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The **PEEP** of **BRAHMĀ**



*Peeps into Hindu
Hearts and Homes*

BEATRICE M. HARBAND

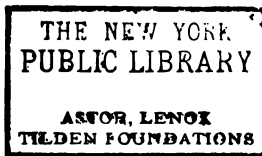


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THE PEN OF BRAHMĀ





A HINDU WIDOW

THE PEN OF BRAHMĀ

PEEPS INTO HINDU HEARTS AND HOMES

BY

BEATRICE M. HARBAND

AUTHOR OF "DAUGHTERS OF DARKNESS IN SUNNY INDIA"

"UNDER THE SHADOW OF DURGAMMA" ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

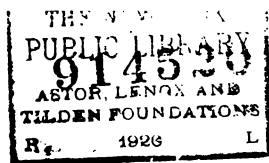


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NEW YORK CHICAGO TORONTO

Publishers of Evangelical Literature

1905



BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

DAUGHTERS OF DARKNESS IN SUNNY INDIA.

Crown 8vo, cloth extra, Illustrated.

"The sufferings of India's daughters are indicated here in a way calculated to win the sympathy of their English sisters. One gets a very vivid picture of Indian life in its pages."—*Examiner*.

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PRÉFACE

THE Hindu Triad consists of Siva, the Destroyer; Vishnu, the Preserver; and Brahmā, the Creator. One of the popular beliefs concerning Brahmā is that at birth he writes upon each child's head its future destiny. The joinings of the bones of the skull are called the letters of Brahmā. Because the writing of Brahmā's Pen is supposed to be unalterable, the Hindu becomes a thorough fatalist. His destiny is written upon his forehead, and nothing which he may do or leave undone can affect it.

A native woman told me the following story accounting for the origin of the belief in Brahmā's Pen amongst her own caste people.

When Brahmā's first daughter was born, his wife asked her lord what would happen to the child in the future, and he, turning his back on the baby, unknowingly traced upon her forehead a dreadful prediction. This was "Fate," for Brahmā could not see what letters his hand was forming. The mother, seeing what was written, begged him to

alter the destiny, and again he wrote from behind his back; but this second time the words were of still more dreadful portent. The mother in anger and pity demanded another fate for her firstborn child. Again Brahmā complied with her wish, and traced out a third fate. Then he threw away his golden pen to prevent his writing another future for the child.

From that day to this he has only written one fate for each person, and whatever that fate is, whether good or evil, must of necessity come to pass.

When I was a girl, living in New Zealand, an English man-of-war lay for several weeks in our land-locked bay. Every night, right into the midst of the darkness, a brilliant light was flashed from the ship over the sleeping town. It lit up the harbour, the wharves, and the streets. It revealed every lurking shadow thrown by the rocks, the trees, and the hill-top peaks. The darkness and the shadows fled as though by magic before the penetrating beams of the searchlight from that vessel of war.

In India, I have seen, dancing among the trees, flashing out of the jungle, gleaming from the ground, myriad hosts of tiny fireflies. Sometimes the whole place seems alive with them. They come and go like the twinkling stars in a midnight sky. Even when the fireflies are multiplied a millionfold, they

only show up the dim, shadowy outlines of the trees or bushes near which they flash and gleam.

While I have been writing these stories, the thought in my mind has been that India needs the powerful searchlight of the Sun of Righteousness, and all the time she is merely receiving the faint flash of the glow-worm.

To everyone who reads these sketches, I want the message to be, "Let thine ears be opened to the sound of the needs of the heathen men and women in this land of India, and then let thine eyes be upon the field, and go thou after the reapers who are already harvesting, until the dim light that is here and there shall burst forth into the morning glory of a new day crowned with righteousness and peace."

BEATRICE M. HARBAND.

S. INDIA,
15th February 1905.



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CHAPTER I
TWIN SOULS

"She was a widow."—LUKE vii. 12.

CHAPTER I

TWIN SOULS

“DO not weep, my pearl, my precious jewel. Star of my life, do not weep. It breaks my heart to see your sorrow, and to know I cannot help you. Dry your tears, my child, and smile into my face again. Let me know that you will be brave and not anger the gods by your moans and tears. My little one, it is your fate ; the decree went forth before you were born, written by the iron pen of the despotic Shiva, that this day’s misery should come upon you and me.” As she uttered the last words of self-pity, the Hindu mother’s fortitude gave way, and in an agony of grief she clasped the sobbing child to her breast, letting her own tears fall thick and fast upon the little maiden’s glossy black hair. Together they mingled their tears, until the child slept from sheer exhaustion, and the mother laid her upon a mat in the darkest corner of the room, and then sank by her side in a pitiful heap.

The first burst of her grief was over, and now she lay numbed with the thought of the sorrow that had come into her child’s life. She tried to think of some way of escape for her darling, but there was none. The cruel laws of her country were round

her like a mesh, and only death could release her from the observance of those laws.

Once she roused herself to pick up the sleeping child, determined to carry her swiftly to the Brahmin's well, jump into its dark, cold depths, and so end their sorrows in one moment of time; but her movement awoke the little sleeper, who sat up, and stretched out her hands in the darkness to try and touch the mother who but then was bending over her with thoughts of murder and suicide in her heart.

"Oh, my mother! my mother!" wailed out the child, "tell me it is not true! It cannot be true that I, your little Mallakka, am that hideous thing they called me yesterday. Oh, mother! mother! I am not a widow. I will not be a widow. Say it is all a dream sent by some tormenting devil, and that I am once more your happy, laughing baby-girl!"

But the mother was silent. The darkness of the room and the denser darkness of her own soul seemed stifling her and compelling her to draw her breath in long, heavy gasps before she could find her voice to utter a word.

"Mother, you do not speak. Will the light come soon, and shall I be happy again? Shall I forget all the dreadful things the women said yesterday?"

"My little one, my little one, it is all too true, it is no vision that the darkness brings. You will never be happy again. Two years ago the curse descended upon me, and now it has fallen upon you. Henceforth your lot will be one of misery and sorrow, cruelty and bondage, dishonour and degradation."

The child crept closer within the sheltering arms that were about her as though they would protect her from all the dreadful import of the words that were being poured into her childish ears. Then, with her head on her mother's shoulder, she whispered, "But why am I a widow, my mother? I know why you are a widow. Because the fever came to my father, and he died, our relatives cut off your hair, and took away your jewels, and so you became a widow. But why am I a widow? Tell me, my mother, what makes me a widow?"

"Alas! my child, do you not understand that your husband is dead, and that in consequence you are doomed by the gods to lifelong widowhood such as I have borne for two years!"

"My husband! What is a husband? I don't know him. Who is he? I never saw him."

At her daughter's artless questions and remarks, the mother's tears broke out afresh, and she could only sway herself backwards and forwards, in utter abandonment, till the child within her arms, frightened and weary with all she had gone through during the last twenty-four hours, gave herself up to wailing and crying in the hysterical Eastern fashion that she had seen the women around her indulge in upon every sorrowful occasion.

Little Mallakka had very dim notions as to why she wept. Perhaps it was the force of her mother's example; for the Hindu mother and child were all in all to each other.

The condition of the mother, whether of joy or sorrow, acted upon the child, and influenced her

susceptible little mind in a way she could not explain.

If mother looked sad, as she always seemed to do ever since the day when father had been carried out of the house and burnt to ashes, then the light died out of Mallakka's dark eyes. When mother wept every time the barber shaved her head, Mallakka too shed ready and sympathetic tears that could be banished as soon as mother roused herself to go her accustomed round in the house, backwards and forwards to the well, and up and down the narrow streets of the Pettah to buy in from the bazaars all that was required for the daily consumption of the numerous household of which she was the common drudge.

Yesterday morning the Hindu child's sun had shone out brightly, for mother was happy, and had promised her some new glass bangles to wear at a forthcoming festival. With the joy of anticipation in her heart, she had run off to mingle with other children around a huge car that was being gaudily decorated in a back street in readiness for the procession that was to be held in Krishna's honour. But quite suddenly, even as she squabbled with her companions over the possession of some of the tinsel trappings that fell from the hands of the crude artists at work on the car, her sky had become overcast, and black darkness had enveloped her in a heavy mantle, as a neighbour had hastily seized her arm, and hurried her, without explanation, to the home she shared with her widowed mother and two married brothers. There, all was confusion, for the

place was crowded with wailing women, who, at the sight of her, cried out the louder, and huddled together to make a clear space for the astonished child.

One look into her mother's face sent a cold chill all through her warm, palpitating little frame, and then her frightened glance travelled from one to another; for no one spoke except to utter curses and cries for protection in one and the same breath.

By degrees, Mallakka made out that someone, whom she did not know, was dead, and that the death of this unknown one was going to affect her in some dreadful way that she could not, and did not want to, understand.

Once there was a lull in the noise made by the women, and an old midwife walked in, bearing an open chatty of live charcoal. She went quite close to Mallakka and placed the fire where it almost touched her limp little hand; but her mother had snatched her fiercely away from the chatty, and in excited tones had declared that her darling baby should not burn, no, not even though she wished it herself.

At this outburst of indignation, the neighbours felt themselves cheated of the pleasant spectacle of seeing the mother encourage her widowed child to thrust her soft hand into the hot embers as a sign of her desire to burn with her dead husband's body, and so the majority of them had retired to their own quarters, suddenly remembering that they were within the shadow of a twofold curse.

It was after they were left alone that Chandamma, the widowed mother, strove to make plain to the

innocent little maiden what the death of the stranger in far-away Benares meant to her personally. Poor Chandamma knew only too well, from her own sad experience, the bitter lot of widowhood ; and when she realised that the curse had fallen on her child as well as on herself, she felt almost frantic with a mad, burning anger against the whole pantheon of Hindu gods, goddesses, and demons, who seemed to have signalled her out to torture her according to their own sportive fancies. She felt she could have borne her own lot with patience, and meekly striven to have fulfilled all that her country's customs demanded of her ; but when the blight fell on her ten-year-old darling, for whose sake she had struggled to live during her own terrible widowhood, she rebelled with a rebellion that goaded her on to defy fate, and to launch out by her own deed into the deep dread darkness of the unknown future, that surely could hold no greater suffering than what she already endured.

The two years that followed the first day of Mallakka's widowhood were uneventful ones to the child ; for soon the daily routine was taken up, and with the happy unconsciousness of childhood, she lived on in the present, taking each day as it came without looking into the weary years that might stretch ahead of her.

It was no grief to her when the gold ornament she wore round her neck, as a sign of her marriage, was cut off. At first, the children in the street had mocked her for being without her thali,¹ and some

¹ Gold ornament worn round the neck as a symbol of marriage.

had even called after her the hateful word "widow," and had refused to have her join in their games as of old; but all this had gradually died away, and Mallakka contrived to be happy with the subdued happiness of ordinary Eastern childhood, blissfully ignorant of the fast-approaching day that would see her degradation, brand her a curse to her race, and an outcast from all the innocent little pleasures of a Hindu woman's life.

Not so Chandamma, her mother. Every separate day of the years that came and went was a long-drawn-out agony, with her own physical sufferings added to the mental torture she endured on her daughter's behalf. Every day was a day nearer the time when, according to Hindu idea, Mallakka would be considered a woman, and then she would begin in bitter earnest to know what kind of life the death of her unknown husband had doomed her to.

Chandamma's strong, true love for her daughter really redeemed her from the commonplace amongst her neighbours, who seemed to slip through the days of idleness and monotony like pieces of machinery each fitted into its appropriate place.

If they had any deep yearnings, or unfulfilled desires beyond cooking the rice, and bowing meekly beneath the load of their maternal burdens, they never betrayed themselves to each other; for each woman accepted her lot in a fatalistic mood, believing, as her priests taught her, that she had no right to a will of her own, and whatever age she might attain in her present birth, nothing must be attempted even in her own sphere, according to her own pleasure;

and that, while the cow was sacred, she was fatally depraved, full of vices, yea, even the very gate leading to the lowest hell.

Chandamma accepted passively all that the priests taught, until the morning when her dark-eyed little Mallakka's baby smile struck a responsive chord in her heart, and set the music of her mother's love in motion.

From the first rippling smile, the music had never ceased to play. At first it had been soft and low—only a soothing lullaby—but as the tender light of the baby's eyes flashed into the mother's soul, the love-music sounded louder and louder: it chimed a merry peal, or it rang out a plaintive refrain as the occasion required; it was always there, making her life gladder, brighter, and more joyous than it had ever been before.

At the birth of each of her sons, she had been a proud mother, and had exulted in the favour of the gods, thinking, in the secret recesses of her soul, that she was proving a virtuous wife, the gods knew it, and were blessing her accordingly. But it was reserved for the baby-girl, the despised female child, to call the love-light into her eyes, to make the tender smile hover around her mouth, to teach her tongue words of gentleness and endearment, and to fill her heart with doubts as to the truth of all her husband and the priests impressed upon her with regard to the vicious character of women.

With Mallakka's advent, Chandamma began to dare to think for herself, with the result that, in her own heart at anyrate, she placed her baby first and

the cow second. She was positive her child was not depraved and full of vices. Of course, all other female children were quite as bad, and perhaps even a good deal worse, than the priests said. But not her pretty, winsome Mallakka, with her flashing eyes, smiling mouth, pearly teeth, and soft clinging arms. No, Mallakka was pure and good, and virtuous even as Sita, wife of the great and revered Rama—of this she was certain. And so the years had flown by, until her darling was eight years of age, and then the first blow that made the mother a widow had fallen. Another two years, and a more crushing blow still deprived the child of the husband to whom she had been married at the tender age of four; and now another two years had dragged out their weary length, and the fatal day had dawned upon which the child-widow was to be degraded into the real estate of perpetual widowhood.

It was a lovely day towards the end of June. Heavy, prolonged showers had fallen during the second week of the month, and the hot earth had responded gratefully to the cooling showers, with the result that patches of green were to be seen all about, and the trees, that during the hot weather had become like gaunt spectres with their leafless branches, were budding forth and showing signs of astonishing vitality. Not a fleecy fleck of white was to be seen as far as the eye could scan across the deep blue of the sky, and the sun shone forth regally splendid in his vast dominion.

The household of which Chandamma had once been the head, was astir earlier than usual, for

important ceremonies had to be got through that day.

All the females of the house gathered together to help array little twelve-year-old Mallakka in the festive robes that were put upon her, only to be exchanged in the course of a few hours for the solitary coarse garment that was henceforth to be her badge of drudgery and shame.

Chandamma could not bear to see anyone touch her darling, and insisted on doing all she could for her herself. She combed, anointed with the freshest of cocoanut oil, plaited, and adorned with white flowers her child's abundant black hair. It was she who fastened in the ruby nose jewels, and fixed the cunning little screws that fastened on her bangles and her ear-rings. The widowed mother pushed aside her daughter-in-law, and herself wound the crimson silk sari around the slim girlish form, and then viewed her with a long, despairing look, as she drank in her innocent beauty, and deemed her the loveliest bride that had ever been adorned for a husband.

For a moment, the innocent Mallakka was happy, conscious of the effort that had been put forth to make her look beautiful; but it was only for a fleeting moment that she became absorbed in her own appearance, for her dark eyes rested upon mother's tell-tale face, and with a cry of answering sympathy she exclaimed, "My mother, what does it all mean? Why do you and my sisters dress me as though there were some great festival to attend?"

For answer, all the women began to sob, and cry,

and rend the air with their condolences upon the fate awaiting the gaily-robed child. But only one of the company knew by bitter experience what that fate really meant, and so while her daughters-in-law, her relatives, and her neighbours wept and mourned with the ring of mockery in their voices, Chandamma was bracing herself up to the carrying out of a great resolve; for, come what would, she was determined Mallakka should be saved the insult of living the life that even she, with the weight of middle age upon her head, had not been able to escape. She knew what a temptation Mallakka's innocence, youth, and beauty would offer to the strangers who frequented her sons' home, and she knew, too, that the child's brothers would be no protection to her, for they were orthodox Hindus, and would never trouble themselves about the sufferings of their little sister, widowed in her childhood.

But she had no time to plan then; for soon the bullock cart that was to carry the child-widow to the town burning-ground arrived, and the tear-stained girl was lifted in, while her two sisters-in-law seated themselves on each side of her.

There was no room for Chandamma in the cart, but she drew her cloth up round her own shaven head, and followed on the outskirts of the procession that accompanied the gaily-dressed child to the scene of her degradation. All the way she was uttering bitter curses against her country's gods and vowing vengeance upon the unknown fates that were robbing her child of all that pertains to youth and beauty. Then she was chiding herself for her own rebellion,

and quaking with deadly fear lest by her own evil thoughts she was making things worse for the one who was the joy of her heart and the light of her life.

Arrived at the burning-ground, Mallakka was taken from the cart, and set in the centre of the spectators, while some preliminary ceremonies were gone through, and then, at a signal from the priest, Chandamma's eldest son's wife stepped forward, and with rough hands, as though fearing to touch the quivering body of her little relative, she took off the gay silken sari and the many borrowed jewels from hands, arms, neck, face, and ankles. Then, tearing the flowers from her head, she covered the frightened child with a coarse red cloth of scanty proportions.

Mallakka stood perfectly passive, casting wondering glances from one to another as she sought to find her mother's sympathetic face in the crowd.

The priests kept up a dirge-like wail, and the tom-toms sounded louder and louder as the last act in the drama of degradation was performed by the barber, who, with careless flourishes, first cut the long tresses from her head, till her girlhood's glory lay in a shining heap at her bare feet, and then, with hands that hurried over what he feigned to be a repugnant task, he applied his razor to the well-shaped youthful head, and with a few quick rough passes removed every trace of the much-prized hair, till Mallakka, trembling in every fibre of her sensitive child's body, stood transformed from the early morning's type of a bright and beautiful bride into a

wide-eyed, bald-headed, bare-limbed, scantily-clothed specimen of Hindu widowhood.

The picture of her desolation was the last drop in her mother's cup of bitterness—for that day, at least ; for as she caught the first glimpse of her transformed darling she uttered a long, wild shriek of despair, and fell with a heavy thud to the ground.

The crowd of onlookers who had assembled to take part in the ceremonies attending the child-widow's degradation, drew their garments more closely around them, and moved away from Chandamma's prostrate body. She was a widow too, and might possibly cause a curse to descend from the angry gods upon any who stooped in pity to render her aid. Thus it came to pass that she was left to herself, while her sons and their wives, together with the now weeping Mallakka, returned to their home in the Pettah.

The sun was sinking slowly towards the western horizon when a curious crow alighted on Chandamma's exposed bare head, and pecked at it with such determined goodwill as to cause the poor widow to open her eyes, and pass her hand over her head to find out what was the matter. The crow took alarm at the first approach of the thin brown hand, but, with the inherent curiosity of his tribe, he only retired a few paces, and with a cunning glitter in his beady black eyes he took up his position on a stone, and set up an impudent "caw, caw, caw." The familiar sound further roused Chandamma, and with a great effort she tried to collect her thoughts, with the result that she rose, looked round the

burning-ground, and drawing her sari well up over her head, she prepared to make her way to the only place that afforded her any shelter.

When the lonely and despised old woman arrived at her sons' home, darkness covered the Pettah. Only the dim lights from a few oil lamps shone out through the open doors of the houses she passed. The morning glory of the tropical sky had departed, but millions of twinkling stars came and went in the dome of heaven, yet Chandamma never once looked up. For her no star of hope shone brightly, or beckoned her onwards. She was earth-bound, and her gaze was downwards, always downwards.

She knew her sons and grandsons would be at their evening meal, so she carefully avoided the court where they were sitting, and just groped her way into her own dark corner, and threw herself down upon the bare earthen floor that had been her only couch since her husband's death.

It was not one of her fast days, but sorrow had caused her to loathe the sight of food for some weeks, and she had been content to take the smallest amount that it was possible for her to exist upon. By and by soft low breathing, broken every few seconds by the sound of a catch, as though the sleeper were crying in her dreams, fell upon Chandamma's ear, and she knew instinctively that she was not alone in the old go-down,¹ but that her precious Mallakka must be somewhere near her.

Rising, she stretched forth her hands in the darkness, and felt carefully around the walls of the

¹ An outer room, stable, place for storage, etc.

room, until her bare feet touched the object of her search.

The child was sleeping soundly, and was unconscious of her mother's presence, as she put her own wasted arms around her, and raised her head from the dry hard ground on to her lap. Then she propped herself against the wall, and prepared to pass the night sitting up so that the little one might sleep on in a more comfortable attitude.

No sleep rested Chandamma's heavy eyes. When she was sure Mallakka was fast asleep, she passed her hand all over her head, fondly thinking, in her half-dreamy state, that perhaps it was all a mistake. But no, the head was bare and smooth as the face; then, with a lingering caress, she softly rubbed her skinny fingers up and down the pretty, plump arms and legs, but they too were devoid of all the ornaments so dear to the Hindu woman's heart. A smothered burst of fresh anguish escaped her lips, as in the darkness a mental picture forced itself upon her, and she saw again the dreary burning-ground, with Mallakka, in her childish fear and terror, an object of execration to all, a branded curse for the rest of her life.

The cry disturbed the child, but failed to awake her, and soon her regular breathing acted like a charm on Chandamma, and towards morning she too fell asleep, forgetting for a few hours the sufferings of her past and the hopeless vista of the future.

The next morning brought to little Mallakka the first real day in her new life as an initiated widow.

There was no more mingling with companions in

the street, no more sharing of dainty tit-bits left over from the men's food, and no more shielding from exposure in the open bazaars. Henceforth she must share in the menial tasks of the home; she must slink along the streets with averted face, step aside for more favoured passers-by, proclaim by her attire her forlorn condition, sleep on the bare ground, eat only one meal a day, and fast completely for two appointed days during every month.

Five years of widowed life changed the pretty, laughing, healthy Mallakka into a tall, emaciated, sad-eyed, prematurely old woman. Chandamma's love had not proved capable of devising any way of escape from the daily burden of widowhood, either for herself or her child. The most she had been able to do was by example as well as by precept to encourage her to observe the rigorous rules laid down for the guidance of widows in seeking to aid their departed husband's spirit through its next birth. Together the mother and daughter fasted; together they performed their daily pooja; and where Mallakka went, Chandamma sought to follow, and in this way the elder widow was a means of protection to the younger one. Once, when Mallakka had almost yielded to the persuasions of an emissary from Benares to join his company, and steal away in secret to the alluring life of the Holy City, the mother's power over the girl had prevailed. Mallakka had yielded to her wishes, and stayed with her because the emissary would not take Chandamma too. She was old and worn, and he only wanted fresh young girls like Mallakka.

It was midsummer, in the centre of the Deccan, and one midday, when the sun was blazing away in a white heat of fiery fury, Mallakka lay stretched full length upon the heated ground near the well to which she had dragged her fever-logged limbs to obtain the water which she might not touch, for it was one of her monthly fast days.

Between her poor worn-out body and the hot, parched, cracking ground there was only her rag of a sari, thin and discoloured with constant wear of day and night for the past five years. Between her and the pitiless rays of the tropical sun no kind shade intervened. The earth beneath her burnt her, the sun above scorched her, and the fever demon within consumed her. Her tongue was dry and parched. No movement brought any refreshing saliva to moisten its leathery hardness. As she lay, she craved water, water—only a few drops upon that burning day to cool her tongue and moisten her lips. Water, water! But none gave. No one heeded her cry. None came to the well at that hour of the day, and it was only the urgent command of one of her sisters-in-law that had driven Mallakka forth at the hottest hour of the day to refill an empty chatty for the cook-house.

Her eldest brother had brought a stranger in to a late breakfast, and more bath water was needed; so the fever-stricken, fasting, widowed Mallakka had been the one ordered to fetch it. She and her mother had to carry every drop of the household water three-quarters of a mile. In the early morning and the cool of the evening they generally per-

formed their laborious task, and the midday work had proved too much for the girl. Old Chandamma had been sent off in another direction to the bazaar to buy in some extra pickles and fruit to add to the already delayed meal. She returned home first, and was at once alarmed at not finding Mallakka in her accustomed corner of the go-down they shared.

While in the bazaar she had spent a pie¹ of the money given to her to pander to the elderly Brahmin's appetite, in buying a slice of water melon for Mallakka. Somehow she had managed to secrete it in a fold of the cloth around her waist. With a feeling of satisfaction in her heart, at her own cunning in obtaining the melon, she counted how many hours longer Mallakka must fast, before the juicy morsel might, with safety to her dead husband's future, be placed in the famished girl's mouth.

Impatiently Chandamma waited for the sound of Mallakka's faltering footsteps, but they came not. Lakshmi, her daughter-in-law, was raving in anger at her non-return, and to get away from the sight of her lowering face, Chandamma once more drew her cloth up over her head, and passed out into the hot air, to find her daughter, and hasten her home with the desired water. As she stepped over the threshold, she came face to face with her son's guest, the strange Brahmin, and in seeking to avoid him, she dodged to one side, with the result that she came into collision with his portly form; for to avoid contact with her he had turned abruptly in

¹ 12 pies = 1 anna. 1 anna = 1 penny.

the same direction as the widow. After the collision there was a slight rebound, and both Chandamma and the Brahmin fell to the ground. Now, the Brahmin was well-favoured. His large bones were in enforced retirement beneath masses of firm flesh. His waist measure almost defied the length of the ordinary cord sold in the bazaars for securing the loin cloth. Under these circumstances, it was no wonder that he came with some force upon the ground, and needed the tender ministrations of his friend, Trivikrama, to help him into first a sitting and then a standing posture. It took him some time to recover his breath, and the first use he made of that restored blessing was to call down the wrath of gods and devils upon the slim form of the despised widow, who had risen without any assistance, and had hastened away, fearful of hearing the volley of curses that she knew only too well would certainly be hurled at her after such an awful catastrophe.

Trivikrama tried to soothe his friend by explaining that the woman was his mother, and, owing to the interference of the British Government in matters that did not concern them, a necessary evil in his house.

In order to further soothe the irritated feelings of his guest, he joined him in wishing the day close at hand when the woman who had given him birth should atone for her presumption in continuing to live after her lord's death, by her body being left for carrion to feed upon, and her spirit passing into the form of a reptile.

Meanwhile, Chandamma made her way to the well, almost forgetting her encounter with the Brahmin in her anxiety to find out what had become of Mallakka.

She thought the girl was dead as she knelt by her side and tried to raise her head, but with the movement, a faint moan escaped the black cracked lips, and bending close to her, Chandamma fancied she caught the word "water."

With a supreme effort, she dragged her child into the tiny bit of shade cast by the stone wall around the well, and then, with a frightened glance in every direction to see that she was alone, she let the chatty Mallakka had carried to the well down into its silent depths, and drew it again to the surface, full of cool water. Without any further hesitation, she poured a few drops down the girl's parched throat, and then deliberately drank some herself.

The gods would avenge themselves upon her, she knew, but they were already punishing her, and daily loading her with grievous burdens, and one trial more or less would make little difference, she argued. Besides, she had slacked Mallakka's thirst, and her darling would be grateful, and not angry. She was the only one in the wide world who had not scorned, despised, and cursed her during the past seven years, and she felt she could afford to brave the whole army of India's gods if those few drops of water brought the love-light back to Mallakka's eyes.

While these thoughts were passing through her mind, she hung over her suffering child in an agony

of suspense, trying to raise her head from the earth, and pillow it upon the lap she could not make ; for her own sufferings had reduced her to mere skin and bones, which no amount of manipulation of her one garment would conceal.

She managed, however, to hold her in an upright position propped against herself, and soon the girl revived, and asked for more water. With the effort to speak her poor tongue clicked against her mouth, and her heavy eyelids lifted their shade from her despairing, sunken eyes. Suddenly Chandamma remembered the piece of melon tucked in a fold of her cloth, and without another thought of breaking fast, she pressed one juicy piece after another into the fevered mouth of the starving girl.

Chandamma knew what was the matter with her child, and she knew, too, the remedy ; and so with persevering gentleness, by the side of that deserted well, she ministered to her wants, and felt a half thrill of pleasure in her withered old heart that she could do even this little to alleviate the hunger and thirst pangs that had so terribly prostrated her beloved little one, the victim of fate's cruel sport.

She forgot for the time being her own sufferings ; she forgot that Trivikrama's wife was still waiting for the long-delayed chatty of water ; and while Mallakka reclined in a half-unconscious state against her, the hours crept by, the fierce heat of day declined, and troops of bright, laughing girls began to gather round the well for their evening's supply of water.

They chatted away with their ordinary gossip, but few of them threw even a pitying glance to where the two widows half lay and half sat. They were quite used to seeing such objects of misery. All widows were unhappy, and justly so; for they were only working out in this birth their fixed destiny: they had been born in this present birth on purpose to become widows, and so suffer the penalty of evil deeds committed in some past state of existence; and if any of them stooped to pity, it might be reckoned into the sum of their evil deeds, for all they knew to the contrary; so they left the two severely alone, and Chandamma was glad to escape being questioned.

The night fell, and darkness wrapped its mantle of secrecy over the sleeping town and around the two lonely women still huddled together near the well.

It was just a little bit cooler, and Mallakka began to shake with ague as a result of her fevered body being exposed to the night air. By and by she began to talk incoherently, then she grew quiet, and, to Chandamma's surprise, in a few minutes spoke in a natural tone of voice.

"My mother, are you there? Hold me closer, as you did when I was a little one."

"Yes, yes, my Mallakka."

"My mother, tell me again why I am different from other girls. Why must I not eat my food every day? Why do people look with averted eyes, and utter a curse if I venture in their way?"

"My child, my little Mallakka, remember that you

are a widow, and that your husband died in Benares many years ago."

"I don't know anything about a husband. I never saw my husband. Why should I suffer because he died?"

"My little one, you know not what you say. It is our custom, the custom of the land. We are women, therefore we must suffer, for we are depraved and evil creatures. The poojarees¹ and the gurus² all agree that we are wicked, and they know. We have no desires of our own. We have only bodies that feel the heat of the day, the weight of the years, the sting of the daily insult, and the keen pangs of hunger and thirst."

"My mother, it grows very dark. The stars have all gone, and I am cold and frightened. Mother, mother, when will the light come? Ah, mother! the gods are all quarrelling about me. I see thousands of serpents with fiery eyes and hissing tongues waiting to swallow me up. No, no, no! They are going to spring on me now, and poison me with their terrible sting. Oh, mother! mother! Shival Krishna! Ganesa! Ganesa! Basavana! I know I am wicked, wicked, wicked, but I am a widow, and I couldn't help it. Ah! don't let me be born a woman again; anything else, but not a woman—a widow!"

Mallakka had thrown herself against her mother in the first frenzy of her delirium. Her wild utterances ended in a shriek of despair, followed by a great silence, as her imprisoned soul was liberated by the loving angel of death.

¹ Priests.

² Teachers.

Into the darkness of darkest heathenism the child Mallakka opened her baby eyes. In darkness she lived, and in thick darkness she died.

The light of the morning she craved on the first day of her widowhood never dawned for her. Others walked in light and love, but, alas for Mallakka and thousands like her, they who knew the Light and Life of the World kept the knowledge to themselves, and turned a deaf ear to the anguished cry of the sorrowing ones in distant, darkened lands.

Chandamma's ever-ready arms were passed protectingly around the delirious girl, even while her own heart throbbed with terror at the wild cries, and then at the sudden silence. It was some minutes before the truth forced itself upon her, and it was well that the kindly darkness hid from her loving eyes the distorted and agonised face of her one-time baby girl.

The old widow shivered with apprehension as she spoke softly to the burden in her arms. Then she passed her hands over the loved face as she had done five years ago on the first dreadful night after her child's degradation. As she felt it cold and clammy, and realised the extra weight of what she was supporting, something within her snapped, there was a wild rush around her, and her clutch upon the dead girl loosened as she slipped to the hot ground, and lay still for ever.

When the early-morning drawers of water approached the well, the mother and daughter were still clasped in each other's arms.

Love had bound those two Hindu hearts together
in life. Would it separate them in the Great
Beyond?

Who amongst us can tell? Shall not the Judge
of all the earth do right?

CHAPTER II
THE STIRRED-UP NEST

“As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings, so the Lord alone did lead him.”—
DEUT. xxxii. 11, 12.

CHAPTER II

THE STIRRED-UP NEST

“**B**HOY!” “Yes, Ma! coming, Ma,” and with the last words the bhoy appeared on the broad verandah of the bungalow, where a young English girl stood awaiting the arrival of a carriage to take her for a drive in the cool of the evening.

How picturesque the house bhoy looked in his snowy white loin cloth, clean linen jacket, and the handsome turban surmounting his complacent brown face.

“Bhoy, what birds are these?” And the English girl pointed to a pair of large ill-feathered birds walking about the compound in which her father’s house was situated.

“Those birds, Missyamma! What you call them in your English tongue! the name not coming to me just now”; and the bhoy’s bronze face looked troubled at his English being so much at fault. Then it lit up as with a sudden inspiration.

“What Missyamma call little playthings, boys send up in the air, with string to hold in front, and string and paper behind—tails, Missyamma. Tails behind, and string in front,” and the bhoy illustrated

his point by making sweeping gestures in the air.

The girl laughed sweetly, amused at the servant's quaint attempt to enlighten her.

Then in her turn she pretended to put on her puzzling cap to fit a name on to "playthings" flying in the air with strings in front and tails behind.

"Ah, I know! You mean a kite. Are those birds kites?"

The bhoj made a salaam in admiration of the girl's ready solution of his difficulty, and then showed a set of beautifully even white teeth as he smiled with genuine pleasure at adding another word to his English vocabulary.

"Kites, Missyamma. Yes, those birds called kites. In that big tree they have a great nest. Some day soon little kites coming out of that nest, and then big kites, little kites, all go away together."

"Oh, thank you, bhoj. Yes, I'll remember the kites with the string in front and the tails behind." And making him a salaam, she got into the carriage that had driven to the door while she was talking.

Mary Warwick was the young daughter of an English officer stationed in Central India. It was greatly against her own inclination that she had recently joined her widowed father in the land of his adoption. The years of her early girlhood had passed so pleasantly, in her aunt's home in the south of England, and she had dreaded having to leave her, who had been a second mother to her,

and going away to India with all its climatic and other discomforts. She always knew her father would claim her "some day," but the "some day" was to her a day in the far future, and only to be thought about as a disagreeable fact, that would hang as a little cloud upon the sunny horizon of her life. However, time had hastened on with winged footsteps. One day death entered the happy little home, took away the dearly loved aunt, left Mary alone and unprotected, and another ten days saw her upon the deck of a great P. & O. boat outward bound for the unknown land of India, where her father was awaiting her.

Two or three of the house servants hailed her arrival in their midst with supreme satisfaction, for the one great reason that she always spoke to them in English, and it was such a grand opportunity for them to improve their acquaintance with the tongue that the great sahibs always used when speaking amongst themselves.

For this reason alone, the house bhoy sought every opportunity of being near his young mistress. He was always at hand to help her out of a difficulty, or to give her some piece of information.

One morning, about a fortnight after Mary had first noticed the vultures in the compound, she was lounging in a rattan chair placed in the shadiest part of the verandah, and trying to pass away the time until breakfast was ready in reading a book. But the mosquitoes worried her, and even in the early morning hours she felt drowsy with the in-

cessant hum of insect life. Quietly her book slipped from her relaxed fingers, and bhoy glided noiselessly from behind her chair to pick it up. She thanked him, and attempted to open the book; but her attention flagged, and again the bhoy was on the alert to place a fan insinuatingly within her reach, murmuring at the same time that it was very hot for English ladies, but not too hot for little kites to fly.

"What do you mean, bhoy, about little kites flying? There is not a breath of wind stirring, even if there were the children with their kites."

The bhoy had gained his point, and started the English lady talking; so he came a step forward, and said in a tone of inquiry—

"Missy will remember the big birds she saw walking about in the compound?"

"Yes, I remember you said they would soon go away. Have they gone yet?"

"No, Missyamma. Those birds all going away, perhaps to-day, perhaps to-morrow."

"All! Why, how many are there?"

"Two mother, father, birds; five children birds. That way saying in English, Missyamma?" asked the anxious student of her mother tongue.

But Mary forgot to give the required information. Her languor had fled, and she was eager to see the birds which contemplated flight "perhaps to-day, perhaps to-morrow."

"Where are they, bhoy? I should like to see them," she said.

In a minute the bhoy had disappeared, but only

to return with a topee¹ and an umbrella as a protection to the girl's head from the morning sunshine in the open compound, and soon she was standing under the largest tree the compound could boast, and at her feet lay a great heap of twigs, rough branches, broken sticks, and other materials that might have been gathered together for a picnic fire.

Overhead, in the branches of the tree, were five frightened, quivering, ugly little birds. At least they looked small in comparison with the parent birds perched on a branch higher up.

"What is all this rubbish, bhoy? Father won't like to see the compound so untidy," were the girl's first words as her gaze travelled from the birds overhead to the heap at her feet.

"That rubbish, Missyamma," said the bhoy, his face all aglow at the new word so easily acquired, "is the bird's nest. This morning the father bird, the mother bird, very busy, smash the big nest all to pieces, make little birds sit on the branches."

"But why, the poor young birds will die if they have no nest to stay in. It was very cruel of the old birds to so thoroughly destroy the nest, before their little ones could look after themselves."

"Cruel, cruel," repeated the servant.

"Yes, surely the old birds could not love their little ones very much to break up the nest and turn them out of their snug and comfortable home before they could fly."

Her English was too rapid for even the intelligent butler to comprehend, and so, by way of answer, he

¹ Pith hat.

pointed again to the birds, and said, "Missyamma, look! See little birds learning cruel lesson." And he watched his young mistress out of the corner of his eye, to see the effect of the word "cruel," that he had managed to drag into his sentence.

Mary did look, and soon she became quite fascinated in watching the lesson that was being taught in the leafy school overhead. Apparently, the mother bird was trying to coax her young to attempt an easy flight from the one low branch to the slightly higher one upon which she was perched; but there they sat, clinging in their bird-like terror to the support of the branch around which their claws were firmly fastened.

A good deal of bird language went on, and Mary fancied she could hear how the wise old mother vulture was coaxing and persuading, and then assuring her nestlings of her speedy succour if their wings failed them in their first easy flight.

"Try, try, try," she seemed to be saying.

But no. There they sat, trembling and imploring, shaking and helpless; their bright piercing eyes peered hither and thither, as, all regardless of their mother's invitation to try and fly, they sought to find out the old nest, in which to cuddle down once more, and hide their trembling bodies.

But the nest was gone, broken and destroyed beyond all recognition. The old vulture had stirred it up to a good purpose.

"Try, try, try," rasped out the old mother, as Mary still watched; but the hearts of the nestlings beat so fast with dread at their homeless condition,

that they dare not try to do what their mother was so earnestly bidding them do.

At last, Mary concluded the mother bird became desperate at the frightened stupidity displayed by the little ones, for she suddenly adopted a new ruse to get the five tremblers to move from their perch.

With a few gentle sweeps of her great wings, she was beside her little ones, and then they needed no coaxing to scramble on her back and wings, and Mary fairly clapped her hands with delight to see the mother bird and her family together once more.

No thought of fear assailed the young ones as the mother rose to a fair height; for her wings and her broad back were their safe resting-places.

But just as their trembling fears were subsiding, and they were feeling refreshed with their easy ascent, the cunning old bird gave herself a sudden shake, and the unsuspecting little ones were without a moment's warning precipitated into mid-air.

Some of them turned somersaults, and all of them fluttered nervously; but in that moment of dire distress the latent power in their wings asserted itself naturally, and each terror-stricken bird began feebly flapping the wings that some day would carry it soaring away above the highest mountain peaks.

Mary's heart throbbed with fear as to what would happen next, when she saw the mother so relentlessly shake off her young ones. In her excitement, she was hardly prepared for the next movement of the old bird, who had no sooner got rid of her feathered burden than, with a dexterous turn, she was beneath the struggling brood, and with out-

stretched wings had caught them all again on to the resting-place that was so sure and welcome to them. With her fivefold burden she alighted on a strong branch, rested a while, and then once more soared into the air, and repeated her trick of shaking the little ones off, forcing them to try their wings, and then quickly catching them before they could possibly fall.

Mary drew a long breath of satisfaction as she watched the repeated manœuvres, and realised that the mother was compelling her young to use the power that they, in their ignorance, did not know they possessed.

Each time the young birds used their wings longer and more steadily, till at last they flew quite a distance without their mother going to the rescue.

When the old bird seemed quite satisfied that her pupils were gaining confidence in the art of flying, she once more left them alone, and perched herself on a distant branch, while she again uttered the harsh sound that Mary was positive meant "try to fly, try to fly," and this time four of the young brood, waxing confident in the power they had discovered in their wings, did try, and managed to reach their mother in safety; but the fifth was timid and still trembling, and required further coaxing and petting before it would venture from one branch to another.

Mary became so interested that she stayed on watching the birds until they had actually accomplished a flight from the tree where their rough

home had been to another smaller tree some yards away.

Their progress had been slow but sure. Forced out of the home that the mother bird in her wisdom had destroyed, by the help of her outspread and upbearing wings they had become self-reliant, and in a few days the little nestlings who had been reared, and fed, and led safely on thus far through their brief lives, would be soaring away to dizzy heights and perilous places.

Mary would fain have stayed longer, but the breakfast bell rang, and she hurried back to the bungalow to be in time to pour out her father's coffee.

She could hardly wait for her father to sit down before she burst out with—

"Oh, father dear, this morning I have been watching a sight that I am sure Moses must often have seen during those long years he spent in the wilderness."

"Yes; and what was it that you and Moses have both gazed upon?" said her father, delighted to see his daughter so radiant despite the heat and her foreign surroundings.

"Oh, you know, father, how Moses compares God's care in leading His children safely on through their earthly pilgrimage to the way the eagle treats her young when she is teaching them to fly. Well, this morning I have seen that verse, 'As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings, so the Lord alone did lead

him,' fully illustrated. Moses could never have written that verse if he had not seen the old eagles tenderly teaching their little ones as I have done. Directly after breakfast I am going to write a full account of the birds' object-lesson to my old Sunday-school teacher, and ask her to read the letter to the girls who are still in the class. Then I can just imagine how beautifully she will apply all the points, and show how, like the mother bird, God often deals with His followers in a way they cannot understand, and yet all the time He is preparing them for the revelation of His wise, grand purposes."

The girl paused in her talk so suddenly that her father looked up from the curry and rice he was eating, and was surprised to see his daughter's eyes luminous with the suspicion of sudden emotion.

"What is it, Mary?" he exclaimed. "Thinking of the old Sunday-school class and the teacher you were so fond of has made you long to be back in old England again. Come, come, you were so happy a minute ago, this will never do, to begin to fret and cry."

"No, father dear, you are wrong this time. It was quite a different idea that brought me to such a sudden stop in my train of thought. It flashed across me suddenly, while I was generalising for others, that God had stirred up my nest in dear old England, and I came here, but oh, how reluctantly I came. Why did I come? Is there some unknown power lying dormant within me, and is God forcing me to find it out and use it?"

CHAPTER III

THE POOJAREE'S VISION

“Jesus spake a parable unto them, saying, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the pit?”—
LUKE vi. 39.

CHAPTER III

THE POOJAREE'S VISION

A TALL, well-favoured, fair-skinned Brahmin poojaree reclined in an easy attitude of indolence within the pillared courts of a famous heathen temple in Mysore city. He had eaten and was full—full almost to the bursting asunder of his waist cord, yet his personal appearance did not proclaim that his midday meal had been an unusually heavy and indigestible one. Nevertheless, such was the case, and consequently he was lazy and disinclined for any exertion on that warm September afternoon. So there he lay, with a delicious sense of drowsiness creeping all over his body, lulling him into a state of half-watchfulness and semi-slumber. Just such a condition in which he revelled, because then it was that he saw the visions and dreamed the dreams which he told out to the ignorant worshippers who daily thronged the temple, thus gaining for himself an enjoyable reputation of being a highly-favoured priest, specially selected by the gods as one worthy to receive the revelation of their divine purposes.

He delighted to see the wondering and awestruck gaze of the women and girls, whom he always chose

to share his divine secrets. For well he knew they would carry the news of his revelations to their own households, and this was as sure a method of their publication as though he himself wrote special reports for special editions of the daily papers. Indeed, he seldom had a vision but what, with many additions to the original, it eventually appeared in one or other of the local papers; and so his visions were talked over, commented upon, and the certainty of their ultimate fulfilment believed in by the blind, superstitious followers of this blind leader.

The educated men in the Government employ gave but little heed to the snatches of talk they heard amongst their women folk except to repeat the rumours and remarks one to the other, and, in the superiority of their Western education to laugh in a lordly fashion at the stupid simplicity that could believe in and tremble at the prognostications of the overfed and pampered priest. True, they encouraged their wives and daughters to visit him by providing them with the gifts that were their welcome to the temple; gifts that were first laid as offerings upon the altar of the goddess at whose shrine he officiated, and afterwards becoming his personal property, to appropriate for his own purposes of idleness and luxury.

How far Ramachandra, the priest, was wilfully blind to the light that was within him no one will ever know, for he fell a victim to the plague goddess a few weeks after seeing the last vision that was ever vouchsafed to him. The people were hastily fleeing from the already stricken city, and the

exodus of so many thousands meant crippled finances to himself. He did not view with restfulness the prospect of a deserted temple, darkened shrines, and empty money-bags. To-day the oil was low in the lamps, while the flowers were faded and less profuse than a week ago. The girls attached to the temple were returning, friendless and penniless, because their rich owners had left them to their fate, while they themselves fled from disease and death.

Clearly something must be done, and so Ramachandra, his priestly mind troubled, lay blinking in the midday sunshine, courting a vision that should extricate him and the temple service in which he was engaged from the difficulties he foresaw looming ahead.

"Is there heat in the moon? Is there drought in the ocean? Is there fear in a great warrior? Is there doubt in the devotee?" murmured over and over again the would-be dreamer. Clearly Ramachandra believed in his own powers to obtain just the revelation he desired. As sure as the moon was a cold luminous body and the ocean tossed tempestuously by force of much water, so, by reason of his unwavering belief in himself, would his vision come to him.

"Is there doubt in the devotee? Is there doubt, doubt in the devotee? Is there"— But his lips ceased to move, his breathing was regular though heavy, and he glided away into the unconsciousness of a deep sleep, as a woman clad in the garments of widowhood slunk past him, fearful lest the shadow cast by her thin body should touch the sleeping form of the well-nourished poojaree.

Ramachandra got his vision. He was a blind devotee. There was no doubt in his mind, none whatever, and so he got his vision in the shape of a woman, emaciated, despised, diseased, shorn of hair, jewels, and costly raiment; the very embodiment of neglect, ill-usage, hunger, and heart-sorrow. He saw her distinctly, and, though his heavy sleep-gripped body was a terrible incubus, his spirit struggled to rise and follow the shadowy flitting form of the woman who drew him on, on, with a magnetic influence that, try as he would, he could not resist.

His feet seemed shod with leaden sandals, so tardy were they in responding to his will, which the woman in front appeared to have under complete control. Sometimes she looked behind her to see if he were following, and once he drew near enough to see that she was shedding great heavy teardrops, that burst around her in showers of tiny germs of some frightful living disease, that entered and fed upon the bodies of thousands of men, women, and children whom he had hitherto not noticed as blocking up his pathway, so absorbed had he been in the superhuman effort he was making to follow and overtake that fleshless piece of emaciation in the form of a woman. At one moment success smiled at him, and the next failure mocked him; still he toiled on, drawn painfully along by some unseen though wonderfully experienced attractive force.

As he persevered to drag his benumbed limbs along, a great darkness enveloped him like a thick pall of dreadful doom. As it enshrouded him a great temptation came upon him to give up his

pursuit and rest his weary body in the very spot where the darkness had overtaken him. Yet still the frantic pulling force within and around him urged him forward, and proved conqueror over the great desire for rest. And so he made another desperate effort to move, and even with the effort there shot forth from the dense darkness a shaft of rosy, purplish light, gleaming red and yellow around the figure of the woman, that for a moment of time had been obscured from his vision. Anon, the light flashed, and lit up the dome of heaven with an ever-varying brilliancy that only rendered the previous darkness all the more terrifying. Heavy rumbling sounds of distant thunder preceded the lightning, and every flash that came and went revealed in the distance the figure of the famine-stricken woman, whose diseased tears had watered so copiously the ground over which he walked, causing the seeds within it to spring up and yield an abundant harvest to Yama, the lord of the infernal regions.

There she was—a shadowy, unearthly, unreal, though ever-moving, ever-fascinating, ever-electrical power, acting upon him, surely to his own inevitable destruction. He was utterly powerless now, and must at all costs get within the circle of radiating, flashing, fiery light that surrounded, and thus apparently cut off, the object of his pursuit. Suddenly he was conscious of an increased power of movement. His determination of will was acting like a veritable tonic. The heavy shackles of numbness fell from him, the leaden weights on his feet disappeared, a sense of relief surged through him,

and once again he was conscious of his ability to move without restraint. With a half-stifled cry of pleasure he went swiftly forward, got within the elusive, dancing light, which resolved itself into a blinding shower of sparks just at the supreme moment of content when he stretched forth his hands to embrace the woman, who now stood perfectly still, as though inviting him to touch her. Another second, and his arms were around her, only to find that she was no longer a woman, but a very rough upright slab of black Kasi marble. The shock of finding himself embracing a piece of rock awoke him from his dream just as a loosened stone from the roof above him fell with a sounding thud on his bare outstretched foot, and he opened his heavy, dream-filled eyes to see a bandicoot scuttering off in unseemly haste, frightened away by the noise of the falling stones.

It took Ramachandra a few minutes to pull himself together after his not altogether pleasant time of vision-seeing. In reality, his head was almost as heavy as his limbs had been in his dreams, but duty was beckoning him, so he slowly rose from his recumbent position, shook out the folds of his crumpled loin cloth, and generally re-arranged himself with a view to meeting the women, whom he expected that afternoon to listen to his recitations from the Puranas.¹ While he performed his hasty toilet, the meaning of the dream shaped itself in his ever-imaginative brain, and instead of the well-known Puranas, he had a new and fearful story to

¹ Ancient legendary histories.

pour into the ears of the too credulous and superstitious frequenters of the temple courts.

The woman, her death-dealing tears, the thick darkness, the fire and the stone all combined, could have but one interpretation. That stone was certainly an incarnation of one of the gods who had appeared to him in the form of a neglected, down-trodden widow, symbol of a multiplied curse with a power to destroy through disease and fire, and representing in her own appearance the dreadful ravages of famine.

The poojaree had seen his vision, and the meaning was sure. The rest was easy, almost as easy as melting tamarind in a stream; for did he not know of just such a black block of stone as he had beheld in his dream, and was it not lying unused and disregarded in the compound of a grand new temple that had recently been finished in the city. All the stone for this building had been procured from a distant place of pilgrimage, rendered sacred because of its close proximity to a marvellous stream said to possess peculiar powers of healing.

Only a few women and girls came that afternoon to the temple; but their offerings were enough to refill the principal lamp and redecorate the idol shrine. Their pooja over, they gathered, according to their daily custom, around their handsome poojaree and instructor, who knew well how to play upon their superstitious fears and ignorant fancies. Their breath came and went in hurried gasps, and their eyes dilated with horror as they listened to the story he had to tell them of the infuriated goddess Mariamma, who had appeared to him that afternoon telling him of

her rejection by the people of Mysore city, the retribution she was dealing out to them, and the only way in which her anger could be appeased.

The goddess, he said, had condescended to dwell within a certain stone which she had destined to become the chief glory of the new temple lately built in Mysore city. This stone should have been polished by skilled workmen, and set up at the top of the right-hand pillar, guarding the entrance to the temple. From there the goddess would have looked down in benediction upon every worshipper who passed within the sacred precincts. But the workmen had failed to see any beauty in the special stone, and had continually passed it over in favour of material that looked more promising. So the temple had been finished, and the one stone that would have brought fame, wealth, blessing, and prosperity, not only to the temple that found no place in its construction for it, but also to the whole city, lay out in the temple compound, unused, neglected, despised, only a piece of waste building material. "Alas, alas!" sighed the women in chorus, as the priest paused slightly in his narration.

The goddess, provoked into burning wrath at the indignity shown to her material form, had dried up the rivers and blasted the crops, until famine was the result. Then she had sent the messenger of death into the palace and the hovel.

Still men regarded her not, and she was determined to take vengeance by fire unless honour were paid to that rough neglected piece of Kasi marble.

The only compensation that would satisfy her was

for a great tamasha¹ to be held in her honour. After which eight men must carry her on their shoulders, and deliver her over to other eight men, who should await her arrival outside the city gates, and carry her away to the next town. From thence others should carry her on to the next town, and so on, until she should reach the famous and sacred city of Benares, and there find an abiding-place among other sacred relics. As soon as she was at rest in her true home, would hunger, disease, and fire cease from their work of deadly destruction in the proud and ancient city of Mysore.

The women were as duly impressed as the poojaree intended they should be, and they could hardly walk to their homes with the decorum becoming modest Brahmin women, so full were their minds of the extraordinary vision and the favour shown by Mariamma to their priest in thus revealing her purposes to him.

The next day an extended version of the story was being repeated all over the town, and in less than a week the curious, the ignorant, and the superstitious flocked round the feet of Ramachandra, beseeching him to show them a way out of their troubles, which they were now justified in believing were an outcome of Mariamma's righteous indignation, poured upon them as a just punishment for their neglect of her. Numbers of the English-speaking, educated Hindus were impressed with the story, and rather encouraged its circulation than otherwise.

As if to emphasise the truth of what Ramachandra had prophesied, during the course of the next week

¹ Merry-making.

a fire broke out in the Maharajah's palace, and the people who witnessed the terrible destruction wrought by the flames whispered in accents of dread of the mysterious stone, and the responsibility laid upon them as a city for getting it removed from their midst.

That fire in the royal household was almost as mysterious as the neglected piece of stone, but it was a grand lever in the hands of the now doubly famous poojaree, who organised a party of men, a grand ceremonial, and an unusually elaborate procession to assist in carrying the hitherto despised stone without the city walls.

Thousands of people of all castes gathered together round the spot where the incarnated stone was lying in peaceful repose. There was a subdued hum of expectant joy, as they speculated amongst themselves on their probable speedy release from the troubles and distresses that had afflicted them for the past year. Then the word flew from mouth to mouth that the priests were about to commence their religious duty of cleansing the sacred relic from every spot of impurity in freshly drawn milk, and the interest of the onlookers all became centred in the one spot. After the bathing process, hundreds of coconuts were broken before the stone, and limes heaped around it. It was daubed with saffron, and decorated with flowers, and the air became heavy with the fumes of camphor, as the lights were swung backwards and forwards. Finally, the enthusiasm of the people burst out, and their shouts of fanatical joy rent the air for miles around, as the heavy stone was hoisted upon the shoulders of eight men, and

carried in triumph to the time and tune of the discordantly unmusical tom-toms.

The procession moved slowly on through the narrow, dirty, plague-stricken streets. The torches flared, the music continued, the gay decorations of the canopy under which the stone rested looked brilliantly festive in the light of the thousands of swinging lamps, and the crowds jostled and pushed and quarrelled in their endeavour to get near enough to see the marvellous stone, that had the power to work such evil in their midst. At last the gate was reached, and there, surrounded by a group of curious onlookers, was another relay of men waiting to carry the goddess forward on the next stage of her journey.

Many of those who had joined in the procession now turned back, with a relieved feeling that the cloud of doom, that had so long hung over their homes, was drifting away. Others, more ardent in the pursuit of their religious duties, followed on in the wake of the idol god as far as the next village, and with supreme satisfaction witnessed its reception by the simple village folk, who were too awestruck by its sudden appearance in their midst to reason concerning the story that was poured into their ears. With open-eyed astonishment they listened to the details of the poojaree's dream, and the manner in which the stone had commenced its pilgrimage to the sacred city of the north. Forthwith they fell prostrate before it, doing pooja with all the reverence they were capable of, and then hastening to find more men to carry it on its way.

For weeks the stone pursued its journey. Every village it passed through paid homage to it, and each set of bearers added to or subtracted some part from the original story connected with its being sent forth from the far-distant city of Mysore, until Ramachandra, the vision conjuror, would hardly have recognised his own invention.

At last one of the bearers was stricken with fever, a fever that threatened to end fatally; and so his companions left him by the roadside, either to get better or to die, as fate directed. In a few hours another one sickened, and before their next stopping-place was reached four out of the eight men were either dead or dying, lying by the deserted wayside as carrion for the hovering birds of prey. The four living men, in a panic of fear, were ready to drop their charge, leaving it to get along as best it could. Whether to risk the wrath of the goddess by deserting her, or whether to court certain death by carrying her forward, was the problem that presented itself to their untutored minds.

When the fourth man of their company gave in, and lay down to die his lonely death, they were walking along an unfrequented country road, not being at all sure which path to strike in order to reach the next village *en route*; they simply plodded on in an indifferent way rather than make the decision to drop the divinity in the form of a heavy black stone, and then return by the way they had come.

But night came, and they must stop a while for rest and food; so, placing their burden by the roadside, they lit a fire, cooked some food, and lay down

to sleep, not to wake until early morning, when a herd of buffaloes passed that way and disturbed the weary men, who, glad to have someone fresh to talk to, poured out to the herdsmen the story of their disastrous journey, and the death of their comrades, while carrying the precious stone forward on its pilgrimage.

The four men could not move so rapidly as when there were eight of them to share the stone's weight, and so the buffalo-drivers soon left them far behind, but cheered somewhat with the promise of the impending arrival of the stone being reported at once to their village poojaree. The herdsmen reached home at sunset, and soon the news they had gathered on their way was spreading like wildfire from house to house, and preparations were quickly in train to give the new arrival a fitting reception. The village band was called out, torches were lit, and a procession led by the priest moved out of the village, walking for two or three miles, to escort the goddess into a little pandal that had been erected for her accommodation at the entrance to the village; and so, to the accompaniment of blatant music, flaring lights, and wild excitement, Mariamma reached another stage in her northward journey.

All the resources of the village were taxed to their utmost to provide oil, camphor, fruit, nuts, and flowers for the enlightenment, decoration, and consumption of the stone goddess. That apparently simple village poojaree was wise as a serpent in matters pertaining to his own worldly advancement, and sat on well content, knowing he was growing all the richer out of the night's tamasha. What did

it matter to him that the morning found the ignorant village folk so much the poorer, and rather more debauched from their hours of revelry, otherwise called worship. As the first streaks of light appeared in the east, the four bearers urged upon the poojaree the necessity of sending on the stone, and not keeping it a moment after sunrise ; but he, foreseeing an increasing harvest, turned a deaf ear to the entreaties of the men, and kept the worship-inspiring stone in its temporary pandal for a week.

Now, it so happened that the men who had brought the stone left more than that behind them, in the germs of the disease from which their four companions had died. Within the next ten days quite a third of the village was dead or dying. Then, and only then, did the men remember the words of the four strangers with regard to the death-dealing tears of the angry dweller within the black stone, and remembering, they felt sure she was shedding her tears of wrath at not being sent on her way.

The chief ryots and the poojaree held a hasty consultation as to what was to be done to stay the awful death-sickness that had fallen upon the people, with the result that eight healthy men were sought out to carry away the intruder, and strict injunctions were laid upon them to leave it at the next village ere the set of sun. No gladdened throng surged round the stone as it was lifted from beneath the now dilapidated pandal, but only a few men, whom fear had rendered gaunt-eyed, stood silently by and watched its departure.

Surely, coolies never before hastened on with such

lightning speed. They scarcely realised the weight of their burden, so anxious were they to throw the responsibility of its journeying progress upon another set of bearers.

The priest at whose feet they deposited their charge just as the sun dipped below the horizon listened with benign interest to the strange tales the men had scarcely breath to relate. He listened, and understood, and at that very moment, like Ramachandra of Mysore, he found it highly convenient to see a vision, which he forthwith explained to the gaping men and women who thronged around the perspiring bearers of the senseless block of marble. In suave tones, and with many expressive gestures, he told them that for many weeks he had known of the coming of the wonderful stone, because Mariamma had appeared to him in the guise of Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, and had informed him that she had selected a special tree which grew in the centre of the village that enjoyed his own ministrations under which to rest for some months, so that she might refresh herself after the toil of journeying from the now far-distant Mysore.

She had given him explicit instructions as to the building of a shrine, within which the object which she inhabited was to be placed for a season.

In return for this shelter and rest by the wayside, her intention was to bless each one who brought offerings to her, with health, wealth, and prosperity. Every childless wife who did not fail in daily worship for six weeks should at the appointed time become the mother of a son.

The people believed what was told them; their tumult of joy was heard in the streets, and again another blind, self-deluded leader of the grossly blind gained his point of pandering to himself; for those who blindly followed on where he led, set to work with hearty goodwill to build the shrine and place the stone in position. Thus, nearly a hundred miles from the place where it had lain unnoticed and rejected, the destined glory of the temple in Mysore found a shelter and a welcome.

Many lamps were burnt in front and around it, fresh garlands were always found hung upon it, and the poojaree who had seen the last vision concerning it grew fat and sleek out of his share in the profits accruing from the increased devotion of the people, who, to gain the health, prosperity, and other blessings promised to them, were willing to spend and be spent in the service of that unpolished piece of Kasi marble.

Blind leaders of the blind! Why, oh, why are these other sheep of the Good Shepherd's fold left to the guidance of those who are no shepherds, but rather ravening wolves in lamb's clothing?

What saith the Lord of Hosts to those who, knowing the Way, the Truth, and the Life, are not faithful to that which has been committed to their keeping? Listen!

"Woe unto the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the sheep? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill the fatlings; but ye feed not the sheep."

CHAPTER IV
THE GRAIN BAZAAR

"Give, and it shall be given unto you ; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."—LUKE vi. 38.

CHAPTER IV

THE GRAIN BAZAAR

TWO men were walking silently along the dusty road leading from their own village to the town of Somapura. They were grain merchants on a small scale. Twice a week they went backwards and forwards to the Monday and Wednesday markets to dispose of the rice and cholum that they themselves bought at wholesale rates from merchants in a more extensive line of business. The one was sleek and well-favoured, with a jolly-looking face, and merry, twinkling eyes; a man carrying the impression in his face that he was on good terms with himself and the whole world at large, which meant to him the customers who thronged his bazaar until the very last measure of grain had been disposed of. The other was of an avaricious cast of countenance, betraying the constant thought of his mind, which was, Give to your neighbour and customer as little as possible, and grasp with eager clutch as much as you can for yourself. Now, as he did not always get the profit on his sales that he felt himself entitled to, discontent reigned a king in his heart, while frowning furrows and lines of fretfulness were traced in ugly patterns on his thin brown face; for

all must know that miserliness never tends to fatten a man.

In so far as generosity and greed can walk in company, the two men were friends. They lived in the same village, they traded with the same food stuffs, they frequented the same market in Somapura, but they dealt differently with their customers ; and so it came to pass that Sanjiwashetti, the generous, always returned home with empty sacks, while Ramashetti, the avaricious one, had to pay coolie hire for the carrying home of the grain he had not sold. "Small profits and quick returns," was apparently the motto of the one man, while the other clung to his fallacy of "Get much, give little," with the result, that while his neighbour carried on a flourishing trade, he sat for hours in idleness waiting for the ebb of the flowing tide of prosperity that the more fair-dealing grain merchants were experiencing.

This morning, as the two silent men turned their steps in the direction of the Monday market, Ramashetti was pondering over his own lack of success, and he wondered why Sanjiwashetti was so prosperous and he so poverty-stricken. That his lack of prosperity lay in his own style of dealing with his customers he never for a moment imagined. The doors of his thoughts opening inwards, shut out for him the wider range of vision that would have brought him into sympathetic touch with mankind.

At last he was impelled to speak, and he addressed his companion in querulous tones.

"Tell me, oh friend, the reason of your prosperity. Why do you grow rich and flourish exceedingly,

while I am still poor, and cannot dispose of my grain to the same advantage as you do? We both invest the same capital and deal in the same trade, but to you great profit accrues, while to me only very little comes. What is the cause of this?"

"Why do I grow rich?" said Sanjiwashetti, with a meditative air, "why do I grow rich? Oh, Shetti, well, if I am rich, it is because I take good care to keep in favour with the gods. Know, oh friend, that every day when I pass the shrine of Venāyāka, near the gate of the Monday market, I present him with a cocoanut and a lime. Now this little god being a very true god, he smiles well pleased with my gift, sends me along the customers, and my sacks are soon empty."

Ramashetti's mean, crinkled little soul sought to expand to the extent of giving a cocoanut, and a lime too, if therein lay the secret of success, and so he avowed his purpose.

"Ah, is that so, thou deep and cunning merchant? Then I too will follow your example, and offer a cocoanut and a lime to Ganapati. Then, who knows but I may gain his favour, and so become rich."


A mile farther on the road turned sharply to the right, the toll gate leading into Somapura was in sight, and Venāyāka's shrine was reached. With a mischievous twinkle in his dancing black eye, Sanjiwashetti purchased a tender cocoanut from an old woman sitting near the temple. Very deftly she opened the cocoanut, and poured the refreshing milk down the merchant's throat. Then he split the nut in halves, and with entire devotion he

prostrated himself before the fat little image, and laying the two halves solemnly down with the lime in front of them, he said, "Oh Venāyāka, if I make much profit to-day, I will present to you a fourth part." He rose well satisfied, but chuckling a little within himself at the trick he knew he was playing off on Ramashetti, who stood quietly by, watching his friend's apparent devotion.

Then he too prostrated himself, and said, "Oh, great and favouring Ganapati, listen! listen! I am thy poor devotee. In my hand there is no profit from my daily sales. How can I buy even a lime to win thy favour? Remember me as I go to the market this day. Send me customers, and if all my grain is sold, I will, on my return, offer to you a whole sackful of cocoanuts."

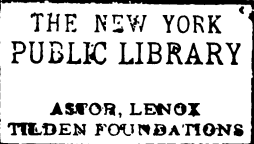
This ended the wayside worship, and the two merchants continued their way. Ere long they reached the open square where the market was held. Soon their mats were spread, and the clean shining heaps of rice and cholum were put out in tempting array, and the merchants sat with measure in hand waiting their early-morning customers, who came daily to get their measure or half-measure of grain as the needs of their household required.

Soon trade was brisk with Sanjiwashetti, who was kept busy every moment supplying his customers. While they chaffed and joked, and laughed at their own or someone else's acumen in securing an extra good bargain, he kept steadily on at his work. The bustle and noise of the bazaar made no difference to him. He was there to measure rice according to





WAYSIDE WORSHIP



the generally accepted trade rules, and he measured it, every measure precisely the same.

His measuring tin was of the standard size and shape, and there was no need for his customers to tap the bottom to see if it were thickened up for purposes of deception.

The measure he used had been his for many years, and those who patronised his bazaar knew it almost as well as he did; they knew it altogether, up and down, and through and through. It was begrimed with the dust of years of measuring, but the dirt was no detriment to its continued use; rather it enhanced its value. So there sat Sanjiwashetti with solemn face, and clever hands that responded with thrills of pleasure to the accustomed trickle, trickle of the grain through his fingers.

Planting the measure in the centre of the grain, he filled it to the brim with his two hands. Then, holding the measure with his left hand, he smoothed the rice across the top, and pressed it down. Then with his two hands he heaped a little more on the top of the pressed measure. Not content with this, he shook it down, and again and again heaped the rice on the top of the measure until some of the tiny grains ran down the sides of the tin, to be lost in the heap from which they had been gathered, and others remained on the top of the vessel, forming a little pyramid over and above what the measure itself would hold.

Thus Sanjiwashetti sold his grain, always giving his customers the heaped-up measure, pressed down and running over. Thus did he deal with the full

measure, thus with the half-measure, and thus with the quarter-measure.

No wonder he sold out quickly, for the poorer of his customers valued highly the little extra they received for the small part of a measure of grain that it was within their power to buy.

As was usually the case, Sanjiwashetti at this special Monday market got rid of his stock-in-trade before Ramashetti had scarcely started the day's business. As he was shaking together the grains that had collected in the crevices of his mat, and putting them into the begging bowl of a crippled leper, a man brought a bullock cart to a standstill in front of his bazaar, and demanded ten rupees' worth of rice.

"Oh, customer with plenty of money! I have just sold out my rice, and am closing shop for to-day. Why are you so late for the market? You must trade with neighbour Ramashetti. See, he has plenty to supply your need."

"Nay, why deal with a man who scarce gives even measure for silver of full weight? How is rice selling to-day?"

"Eleven measures to the rupee."

"That is half a measure less than we bought in the Wednesday market last week. And how many will this jackal give?"

"How can I tell? Try him and see," said Sanjiwashetti, with a look that conveyed more than his words.

"Come, come, my friend, and buy my rice," said Ramashetti, with a greedy glitter in his eye. "I have

ten rupees' worth, and to spare," and he straightway began heaping up a measure for the new customer's inspection.

"Throw another handful on the top," said Ratnappa, who was a missionary's peon,¹ buying in the month's grain for some orphan girls.

Ramashetti did as he was told. He threw another handful on the top, and then another, until the grains ran down the sides of the measure and left the little cone in the centre, in quite the correct style. Ratnappa was satisfied, and gave his order, stipulating that every measure should be according to the first pattern. Ten, twenty, thirty measures were heaped up, pressed down, and then running over were emptied into Ratnappa's sack. Under his watchful eyes Ramashetti dare do no other than deal fairly, but his heart misgave him, and his fingers ached with the unaccustomed duty of piling up the grain measure by measure. Unexpectedly his opportunity came, for Ratnappa turned to salute a passer-by, and, quick as thought, there slipped from Ramashetti's loin cloth a little contrivance that filled up the bottom of the measure, and saved a good deal of grain in the measuring.

With an imperturbable face and steady hands, he went on ostentatiously heaping up the vessel that was the standard of market measurement, and the vigilance of poor Ratnappa was tricked for that day.

The time for closing the bazaar came. Buyer and seller separated: the servant of the European missionary to take his ten rupees' worth of rice

¹ Messenger.

home, and to measure it out himself for his mistress to see that the one hundred and twenty-one measures were correct; and the grain merchant to go back to his village and pay his long-since-forgotten vow to Venāyāka.

Very confidently Ratnappa set to his task of measuring out, under his mistress's eye, the rice he had bought from Ramashetti, but alas! when the count was ended, there were five measures less than had been paid for.

The man's skin glistened with perspiration as he realised there was a mistake somewhere, and he pushed his turban back in consternation as he commenced to remeasure the grain. Carefully, according to the custom of the grain merchant with whom he was in the habit of dealing, did he fill his measure, press it down, and then heap it up; but in the end the result was the same. Nearly eight annas' worth of grain less than he had certainly paid for.

"How do you account for it, Ratnappa?" asked his mistress, for she could see the man was troubled.

"Eleven measures for a rupee. Ten rupees' worth should give one hundred and twenty-one measures, and there are only one hundred and sixteen," was his slow answer.

"That is true, Ratnappa. Now for the reason why there is such a deficiency."

"Alas! O Dhorasani, there is no fault in me. That sly jackal of a Ramashetti must have cheated me. Sanjiwashetti, the honest grain merchant, had sold all his rice. There was much work to do this morning, and I was late in going to the bazaar,

therefore I was obliged to take from the hand of Ramashetti, the deceiver. He never gives good measure, but this morning he promised to serve me well, and I watched, yes, I am sure I watched every measure of rice he poured into the sack, and I counted the number of the measures, exactly one hundred and twenty-one," and the man looked intensely miserable as he finished his long explanation.

"Ratnappa, listen to my words. If one hundred and twenty-one measures went into the sack, then one hundred and twenty-one measures should come out of the sack. Is it not so?"

"That is a true word, O Dhorasani."

"What am I to think, then, about the short measure?"

"How can I tell? The fault is not with me. It is that wicked, greedy Ramashetti who has not given proper measure."

"And I think it is the fault of careless Ratnappa, who did not look sufficiently well after the expenditure of the money that was not his, and who loitered by the way instead of getting off to the bazaar early and trading with an honest merchant."

"O Dhorasani, forgive me, and I will teach that dog of a Ramashetti a lesson for cheating me, and thus making the Dhorasani think I am not an honest servant. Has the grain ever been short by my hand before?"

"No, Ratnappa. It is the first time such a trouble has arisen, and I will make good the loss myself. But if it happens again"—

"It never will happen again, not if I have to kill that Ramashetti," he muttered under his breath.

Meanwhile Ramashetti had gathered together his mat, his deceptive measure, and his empty grain sack, and turned joyfully homewards with a great flapping of the wings of self-congratulation on the stroke of good business that he reckoned he had accomplished that day. It was the first time in many months that he had sold out his entire stock-in-trade, and he became so absorbed in counting over his profits that he forgot all about his promise to present a sack-load of cocoanuts to Ganapati until he came within sight of the temple where he had made the vow. Even his hardened heart told him he must pay at anyrate some part of that which he had vowed, and he began wondering what he should do, when, to his great relief, he saw behind the temple a grove of cocoanut palms. With alacrity he climbed one of the trees, plucked a nut, and hurried back to the shrine. There he placed his offering upon the altar, and then prostrating himself before the idol, said, "O Swami, I made a very, very little profit to-day, and according to my profit, instead of a sackful of cocoanuts, I have brought you this one ripe nut. Please show me thy favour, and receive the payment of my vow."

Then rising, he hurried off to his village, inwardly rejoicing that, in addition to tricking Ratnappa out of five measures of rice, he had also deceived his god as to the amount of profit he had made. Sanjiwashetti and Ramashetti continued their trade as grain merchants, but Ramashetti never again had

such a lucky day as the one on which he vowed and did not pay the sackful of cocoanuts to Venāyāka.

Ratnappa, the mission peon, did not kill the man, according to his threat, but he did practically succeed in killing his already dying trade, for he went up and down the bazaar telling his story, and telling it with such effect that even the men who revelled in tricking their neighbours had their eyes too widely open to give Ramashetti, the avaricious one, the chance of squeezing a little extra profit out of them.

CHAPTER V
SLEEPING IN THE MOONLIGHT

“ Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk.”—MARK ii. 9.

CHAPTER V

SLEEPING IN THE MOONLIGHT

OH for the cool evenings and the fresh, dewy mornings of my island home! Oh for a delicious breeze from the snow-clad Alps or a dip in a babbling creek that makes a music all its own as it flows over the cold stones of its bed to join the larger rivers! Is there ever a cool day or a cool night in this land of brilliant sunshine, tearing rushing winds, and continual drought?

Such were the unspoken thoughts of Leslie Hills as she rose from her customary after-dinner lounge in the compound, and prepared to cross the open space which separated her bungalow from the school premises that sheltered between forty and fifty orphan girls, dark-skinned Indian maidens, who came of a long line of Hindu ancestors, whose thoughts and habits were also an inherent part of themselves.

The shadows of night had fallen, and except for the myriad insect voices, all the land seemed to lie hushed in solemn silence. A late moon had risen in all her Eastern splendour, but even her pale majesty seemed to shine with a power not her own, as though in imitation of the great light created to

rule the day. Leslie Hills, the young missionary in charge of the Girls' Orphan School, was new to her work, and had made the mistake that so many before her had done, in thinking she could work as long and as arduously in a tropical land as she could in the temperate zone, and so she never permitted the slightest relaxation to herself from the many duties that crowded one upon another all through the heat of the long Indian day.

To-night she had come back to her station from a few days' visit to a distant village, and although thoroughly tired with her journey and her work, she could not rest content without seeing that her girls were all well and happy, and bidding good-night to the dusky maidens who formed such a pleasant part of her Indian family.

She would have dearly loved to tuck them all cosily up in bed, but nobody in India ever wants the doubtful luxury of being tucked up in bed; and even if they wanted it, how would it be possible to tuck in bedclothes that did not exist, round a bed that was only a strip of matting just wide enough and long enough to accommodate one lithe brown body.

How cheap, clean, and light, and how easily disposed of, were the beds that the Indian school-girls always slept on!

There was no throwing of them open in the morning to air. No shaking and patting, making and smoothing, and leaving in apple-pie order until night-time demanded some renewed attention in the way of turning down sheets so that their snowy

whiteness might smile a comforting welcome to weary limbs and tired brains.

Leslie's little "Dark eyes," as she sometimes called her children, liked nothing better than to pay her bedroom a visit, and to see and touch the many curious, as they thought, possessions of their English friend.

After the looking-glass, that had the power to show them smiling faces, sad faces, dark faces, and any other sort of face that happened to peep into it, they were most interested in the English bedstead, with its marvellous mattresses of wire and wool, its sheets, its blankets, its counterpane, its pillows, and everything else about it that the luxury-loving English people thought so necessary to their comfort during the quiet hours of the night.

"Don't you fall off in the night?" asked one, the first time she saw Leslie's bed.

"Is the wire strong? Are you sure it won't break and let you through?" said another one, stretching out a thin brown finger to touch the spring mattress that Leslie was explaining the use of.

"How do you get your bed outside when it is too hot to sleep in this room?" was the puzzle the next one wanted solving.

Even after many patient explanations, the merry troop would depart from the missionary's bedroom inwardly thankful that they were not obliged to sleep on such an awe-inspiring structure as the Missyamma's bed. They decided that their own cool strips of bamboo matting were much nicer, far more convenient, and much more comfortable than

the Missyamma's bed, and they determined to try and bring her round to their way of thinking, and get her to sleep on the floor every night, with just a long narrow strip of matting under her, and a thin patchwork quilt drawn over her from top to toe, so that the mosquitoes could not possibly trouble her, or the rats startle her, if they should happen to have a game of "hide-and-seek" over her prostrate body. The children were sorry for Leslie having to sleep on that bed, for somehow their sharp eyes had detected all its inconveniences, without appreciating its comforts.

In discussing its demerits afterwards, one of them said, "Just think what a lot of room it takes up; all our mats, when they are rolled in bundles and tied with a piece of string, would not occupy as much space as that one bed."

"Yes, indeed," agreed another; "how easy it is to take our beds down from the rack at night, and spread them just anywhere we like, and lie down to sleep without any more trouble."

Leslie opened the gate leading into the children's courtyard, and walked with languid steps to their sleeping-room which in the daytime became their dining-room as well as their general living room. Passing out of the brilliant moonlight into the room, that seemed full of dark, mysterious shadows, it took her a few seconds to realise that the space usually occupied by forty recumbent sleeping forms was vacant. No sound of regular breathing smote upon her tired ear, and no mat tripped up her foot as she crossed the threshold.

What could have happened? Where were the girls who should have been soundly sleeping at this hour of night?

All sorts of wild ideas chased each other through Leslie's bewildered brain.

Could the girls, with one accord, have taken advantage of her short absence to run away to see the sights of the alluring outside world? No, they loved their happy home too well for that.

Some of those priestly emissaries from Benares must have found out that she, their lawful guardian, was away, and have come secretly and stolen her darlings from her. Yes, she felt sure that was what had happened. Her girls were so fresh, and young, and pretty; they looked so innocently winsome as they marched backwards and forwards to school every day, that some of the desperate characters of the town must have formed a plot to carry all of them away. She had heard of far worse things than that happening in India.

How long it took her to conjure up all these wild imaginings she did not know, but her languor no longer oppressed her, and with hasty footsteps she cleared the dividing space between the children's room and the matron's. Her voice trembled so much with her anxious forebodings that she could hardly steady it to call out, "Matron! Matronamma! Where are you?"

Her heart almost stood still with renewed terror as she discovered that the matron too was not lying in her accustomed place; for when no answering cry reached her, she walked into the small room usually

occupied by the matron and a few of the younger girls.

"Rouse the servants—send for the police," was the thought whirling through her excited brain as she turned quickly to take a short cut to her own bungalow.

Three quick running steps, and she was out of the shadows cast by the old schoolroom, round a corner, and into the hot air of the clear moonlight; and there, spread out before her astonished gaze, were rows and rows of quietly sleeping figures. What a revulsion of feeling! How absurdly stupid she had been to imagine all the train of evils that must have befallen her girls. Leslie paused just long enough to know that her heart seemed to be beating in its wrong place, and to experience a suffocating sensation in her throat, and then, in a voice rendered unnatural by reason of her agitation, she uttered two words: "Oh, girls!" and somebody awoke at her cry. In another second the scene was changed, for, in hurried consternation at being found sleeping in the open air, the shrouded figures scrambled to their feet, woke their neighbours, and, with commendable presence of mind, picked up their beds, and fled—yes, literally fled—to their proper resting-place.

Miss Hills followed their retreating figures rather more leisurely, and by the time she reached their dormitory every bed was made and apparently every girl was fast asleep, so expeditious had been their flight, even though burdened with the weight of their beds. Leslie knew she had only to utter her usual "Good-night," for every dark head to be

raised from the ground to return her parting words.

She stood on the threshold, as much to calm her excited fears as to count over her flock to see if the number were correct, before drawing a thankful breath, and saying, "Good-night, my children."

"Good-night, Missyamma," came the ready reply, as forty heads were lifted up, showing how quickly their owners had been roused from their well-simulated slumbers. But down went the heads again just as quickly, and as they touched the hard earthen floor the sound of regular breathing floated out to where the English girl stood by the door.

But she had not reckoned with the dusky sleepers yet, and they knew there was more to follow that quiet "Good-night," if they only allowed themselves to be awake. Even with their sleepy ears they heard the next sentence—

"Children, why did you do it? You know quite well that the early morning wind, at this time of the year, brings fever in its train. If I had not roused you all up from sleeping in the moonlight, I should have had ever so many of you down with fever to-morrow, and how puzzled I should have been to account for it."

Not a sound came from those sleeping innocents to indicate they had heard a word of what was being said to them.

"Girls, you must never carry your beds outside again. I was dreadfully frightened to find your room empty, and then quite startled to see you all lying on the ground instead of in your proper

places. Now remember what I say, no more sleeping in the moonlight."

Still that deep silence and regular breathing. Leslie wondered if they were really asleep this time, and if they had not heard, first her question, and then her command.

She moved outside, where all was still again, then returned once more to where her sleeping family lay, and in her usual voice bade them another "Good-night."

"Good - night, Missyamma," came the quick response from the forty who had forgotten to be asleep this time, and before Leslie could say a word herself, a tall figure rose, and became spokeswoman for the whole school.

"Please, dear Missyamma," came in soft, liquid tones, "forgive us this time. It was so hot in here, the lovely moonlight tempted us to carry our beds outside. We don't want to get the fever, Missyamma, but oh! Missy, it is so nice to sleep outside where there are no puchies¹ to bite us," and with this explanation down went the speaker upon her bamboo mat, and the regular breathing, which had been suspended for the time being, once more floated through the room in measured time, yes, and tune too.

Of course, Leslie accepted the apology, and inwardly decided that the girls were not really to blame for choosing their own sleeping apartment. It was all the fault of the beds for being so conveniently made just on purpose to carry from place to place.

¹ Insects.

As she returned to her bungalow, another picture of bed-carrying arose before her, and she fancied she could see a crowd parting hither and thither, as a sick man was being carried along by four friends to the feet of the Great Healer. There they were; strong, stalwart men. Two at the head, and two at the feet, carrying him swiftly along on the mat that had been his resting-place for weary months, and perhaps years.

“Take up thy bed, and walk.”

What a natural order to give, and what an easy command to obey! “Take up that narrow strip of matting, roll it neatly into a bundle, and carry it with thee to the next convenient resting-place that presents itself to thee.”

And he arose immediately, took up his bed, and before the astonished gaze of the multitude, perfectly whole in every limb, he walked away, carrying in his arms the very mat upon which, only a few minutes previously, his four friends had carried him into the very presence of Jesus of Nazareth.



CHAPTER VI
MULTIPLIED SORROWS

*“The famine was in the land of Canaan.”—GEN.
xlv. 5.*

*“Our skin is hot like an oven, because of the burning
heat of the famine.”—LAM. v. 10.*

CHAPTER VI

MULTIPLIED SORROWS

A MOONLESS night brooded darkly over an almost deserted town in Southern India. Gnawing hunger had come as the death messenger to hundreds of homes in Adoni and the surrounding villages. While the people yielded up their lives in unresisting despair, the long-expected and much-prayed-for rain-clouds scudded mockingly across the brilliant blue sky, only to disappear as soon as the starving multitudes felt they might reasonably hope for a few refreshing drops to fall upon their barren fields.

They had long ago given up all hope of tilling their ground for that season. Now their one desire was that at least some water might fall to replenish their wells, and give them just a little to slake their thirst and moisten their hard tongues and thin, cracking lips.

Heavy grey clouds had hung above the horizon all day, giving to the townsfolk a most welcome shade, and at the same time causing a tiny seed akin to hope to spring up afresh in their despairing hearts. They had been mocked so often, but surely to-night the clouds would remain with them, and empty

themselves of their rich abundance, and to-morrow refreshment from the pure water of heaven would be their portion.

The sun had gone, and the fiery after-glow had faded away into dull reds and greys, changing again into angry storm-clouds. Then that dense, still darkness had descended upon the whole town. Men and women almost held their breath, so tense were their feelings as they waited and waited on in an awful agony of suspense for what should happen next. Still the clouds only thickened in density. Towards midnight there were rifts in them, and one by one bright stars shone forth like dancing eyes of derision. Those who were still awake and watching, turned cold with the chill of yet another disappointment; for surely those twinkling lights were the token that the clouds were dispersing and the much-coveted rain was falling elsewhere.

All night long such of the temple servants whom famine and disease had spared were chanting invocations to the ruling deity of the town; and the priest was kept busy receiving the propitiatory offerings that the wealthier townsfolk were eagerly bringing to try and induce the rain god to smile upon them, and grant them the blessing of a copious downpour.

Those who were poor and naked and hungry crawled to the outside of the temple and jealously watched the more fortunate possessors of offerings as they passed in and out of the place of worship.

As they lay prostrate on the ground, the dirge-like chanting of the priestesses reached them, and many an inarticulate cry of anguish came like a

smothered "Amen" at the close of each verse of the prayer, although the substance of it smote monotonously and devoid of actual meaning on their dulled brains.

"O God, what can we do? Our crops are burnt up for want of rain.

Listen! oh most merciful one!
In many ways our condition is hopeless,
We have become degraded.

The earth is parched without rain,
All the crops that were planted are destroyed;
Will our landlords excuse our rents, and permit us free lodgings,
Will they not vex us sorely and bring us to hopeless misery?

The rain, which came from the East, fell in the North;
Why should the rain,
Which unceasingly fell in the South,
Only fail in this Central place?

The people are in trouble.
Alas! the rain has forsaken the earth.
The villages are burnt up—all the rivers are dried—
Is there none to have pity on us?

Look upon us O thou! who art
Lord of the three worlds,
Stretch out thine arm. Is the rain far from thee?
Withhold not thine hand.

All we poor people are agreed
Joining together to beseech thee
To show us kindness by sending in abundance
Thunder, lightning, and rain.

O Lord, thy name will give to all people
Whatsoever they desire.
Send down on the earth the rain which we all love,
Oh cause thy name to be honoured."¹

¹ A prayer in the time of famine from the Kavayapunja, a Kanarese poem.

At the conclusion of the prayer every bell in the temple was set ringing as though to give noisy force to the petition, and then, before their clanging echoes died away, the dirge began again to be voiced through in wailing entreaty.

Anon, the dark clouds divided asunder, assumed fantastic forms, and then silently melted away like shadowy shamefaced thieves, afraid of being caught in the act of deserting some comrade in distress.

The rain had not fallen.

The dawn of another day was near, and the weary watchers knew that their night's invocations had been in vain. Neither prayers nor offerings had prevailed with the god of rain. The rain was no nearer the desired point of falling than as though they had conserved their energies, and sought to snatch a few hours' sleep to wile away the heavy, breathless night. Even while they watched around the temple, several had paid their last tribute to the famine god, slipping away into what was to them the great unknown future existence.

Amongst the earnest devotees of that gloomy night was one, at least, who prayed with all his soul. He was Iyerappa, a poet of some note in the town.

Through all the long days of famine he had kept up a brave heart and put on a cheerful countenance for the sake of his young wife, Rajamma, and their five children, who were the joy and hope of his declining years. To them he looked for strength and support in his old age, which during these famine days seemed to be overtaking him with giant

strides. Already he was grey-headed and elderly-looking.

No one knew quite how much he had ignored the demands of his own appetite that the children might be satisfied with food. Day by day during the last month, the meal his wife cooked became decreasingly less, and yet in some mysterious fashion the portion left over for her and the children always remained the same. Sometimes Iyerappa received an imaginary invitation to take food with his friend Eshwarah, and then there was even more for those left at home.

But the time had come when it was no longer necessary to keep up these little fallacies. Only once in two days had there been anything to put into the cooking pot, and then the whole meal for the seven of them had been so exceedingly small that the gentle Rajamma, with womanly intuition, had divided it out into six equal and one larger portion, keeping her own and the children's apart, until her well-loved master had eaten every grain of what she had set before him.

Clearly things were growing decidedly worse, and the coming days held out for Iyerappa no rainbow promises of seed-time and harvest.

The old man rose from the position he had maintained throughout that weary night of watching and prayer, and longed fervently that he might die, and so escape his present sufferings and leave one mouth less to feed from the scanty meals.

With faltering steps, he turned towards his home, where once fragrant coffee and dainty rice cakes

would have awaited his coming. But there was no such welcome this morning. Instead of joy at his return renewed sorrow was to be his portion; for as he entered the doorway a cry of anguish from his wife greeted him, and he hurried forward to find her moaning over the dead body of their eldest son, of whom he had been justly proud.

As he looked at the dead child, his eyes were opened anew to the ravages that famine had worked upon his once plump little body. Every bone stood out with painful distinctness, and the little cheeks were hollow as a toothless old man's. His hands and feet were like claws in their fleshless emaciation.

Here was fresh trouble for Iyerappa. Only a few minutes ago he had wished himself dead, not giving a thought as to how his body was to be disposed of, and now he was confronted with the difficulty of putting away all that remained of his firstborn son.

Every pice he could lay hands on was needed for food, and where could he find money to buy wood for a funeral pyre; and the old man wrinkled his brow in anxious thought.

Already Rajamma's last jewel had been exchanged for food stuffs. The only bit of gold still in their possession was his wife's thali,¹ her outward symbol of marriage.

He made no attempt to comfort his wife, but for a moment of time was lost to grief and hunger as the memory of happier yesterdays crowded upon

¹ A small gold ornament worn round the neck by married women.

him, and, in painful contrast to the grief-stricken mother and her dead child, he saw once again the bashful little bride in all the rich, glowing beauty of their wedding day, taking her first shy peep at him from beneath her long-lashed eyelids. Again he experienced the thrill of love that the child had awakened within him by her sweet winsomeness, which from their marriage day to this, the death day of their firstborn son, had bound him to her with all the passion that his strong, poetic nature was capable of.

He caught the glint of her golden thali as he roused himself at last, and the temptation was strong upon him to use that token of gladness as a means for covering up the sorrow of death. No, no; he could not do it. He would not sell that to provide a funeral pyre. But the living and the dead could not be left together. Now the thought of ceremonial defilement was uppermost, and that brought to his lips the first words he uttered to the sobbing woman.

"Cease thy weeping, oh daughter of sorrows," he said, in an unnatural tone of voice. "Wail not for the dead, who at least is free now from this present existence. Perchance he has entered into a land of butter and milk, of grains and fruit. Who can tell?"

"Alas! alas! let me die. My star, my hope has left me. Let me die," sobbed out poor Rajamma; and, to emphasise her grief, she pulled down her long raven hair, that had long since ceased to be smooth and glossy.

"Not so, not so; we will arise, and with our living children go forth and seek in a more fortunate place the food that is denied us here."

Now, many had gone forth to seek and to find food in the concentration camps, established at intervals of every few miles all over the famine-stricken districts; but although Iyerappa had long pondered the question of his own setting forth, he had never voiced it before, and so this new and startling suggestion caused Rajamma to stop her hysterical wailing, and to look in consternation between the strands of her fallen hair to listen what the next words should be. There was a constrained pause, and then, "Shall we start at once, before the heat of the day is too great?" Iyerappa asked, looking steadfastly away from his child's dead body.

"At once!" repeated the girl-mother, pushing her hair away from her tear-stained face with a gesture of astonishment, "at once! How can we go until we have performed the last ceremonies for the dead? Do you not understand, oh my master, that your son, your firstborn light and life, is dead, and we shall never see him again?"

"Alas! yes. I understand only too well. But how can we, who are poverty-stricken and starving, dispose of our dead? Are there now any seasons of joy when the maker of verses is called to do his part in the festival?"

Then Iyerappa's eyes took on a wolfish expression as he leaned towards his wife and said in hollow tones, "Others have done it, and we must do

it. Let us desert the dead, and make one last effort for the living."

For the only time in her life, Rajamma recoiled in horror from the look on her husband's face; a sense of thick darkness overcame her; the room and the dead body of the boy swinging round and round in ever-widening circles as she gently passed into merciful forgetfulness.

Then did Iyerappa smite his breast in remorse for his bold proposition, as he thought his wife too had stepped from his side away into the land of shadows. She had no further need of the thali now. Stooping over her to unfasten the shining piece of gold from her poor thin neck, he was surprised to find that she still breathed; so he picked up her light little body and carried her outside into the early morning air.

The streets were deserted, except for a few prowlers, who, like dogs, were seeking a chance scrap to allay the hunger that was slowly but surely killing them. They took no notice of the burden Iyerappa deposited on the house pial. A dead or dying woman held out no promise of food to them.

Again the man returned into the house of death, and in a few minutes came back to where his wife lay. This time he carried a small bundle in his hand, and was followed by four children, who scarce could stand for very weakness. To the eldest girl he intrusted the bundle and a small brass drinking cup, bidding her carry them on her head like a brave little queen, while they set out to search for food.

Then he closed the door of the house, and for a second stared at it in a stupid fashion, as though hardly knowing what to do next, now that he had daringly shut up the dread secret it contained.

An increasing warmth warned him that the sun had shot above the horizon, and he must be moving if the food camp was to be reached that day.

As he paused, not knowing in what direction to turn his feet, a bullock cart wound slowly into view, and Iyerappa recognised in the driver his friend and patron Eshwarah.

Eshwarah driving a bullock cart! What would happen next?

By the time the bullock cart had got on a level with him he had recovered from his astonishment sufficiently to accost this newly installed driver of vehicles.

"Oh friend! where are you going thus early in the morning?"

Eshwarah stopped, and, from force of habit, rolled his tongue round as though some sweet morsel were in his mouth. Then he spoke with some amount of deliberation.

"Know, oh friend Iyerappa, that the famine is in this land of India. Many are dead, others are dying; and those who are left alive are seeking help from Government in the concentration camps. My servants have fled; my beasts are dying for want of food. To get a coolie to drive this bullock is like desiring plantains in a desert. Therefore I only must go and give this poor beast a stomachful from the prickly pear patch, a few miles distant."

Iyerappa listened, but hardly took in the drift of his friend's talk, so wrapped up was he in his own sufferings. By way of answer he said, "Are you going in the direction of the food camp? For I and my family must eat of the stranger's grain, or we die."

"The food camp. Where is the food camp?"

"Alas! I do not know. But I want to get there, and see if there is still a chance for life left to us. Take the woman and the children as far as you go. See, I have still a gold piece in my hand," and he opened his palm, disclosing to Eshwarah's gaze the gold thali he had untied from his wife's neck.

"I'll take them," said his friend, "but keep your gold piece. What is a jewel between you and me? Put the woman in the cart."

Iyerappa needed no second bidding to lift his wife into the bandy, explaining as he did so that she was not dead, only sleeping heavily from hunger and sorrow. Next he placed the wondering children beside her recumbent form.

In another second the bullock moved on, but in a jaded fashion, taking the family of Iyerappa slowly away from the only home they had ever known, and leaving in that home the sickening shadow of his great anguish.

For nearly three hours the starving man trudged stolidly on behind the bullock cart, and then, without giving any warning, he slipped to the ground from sheer exhaustion.

The children from within the cart saw him fall, and in response to their frightened cry, Eshwarah,

walking at the bullock's side, stopped, and, with many exclamations of pity, assisted the fallen man to rise; but he was too weak to walk farther, and the famished bullock was too weak to bear his additional weight. So, without any further thought, the kindly owner of the cart ordered the four children to get out and let their father ride the rest of the way to the prickly pear patch.

Slowly as the starving children were able to walk, they managed to keep up with the bullock, that in its uncomplaining dumbness must have suffered almost as much as they did.

In another hour the patch was reached. It was the first scrap of green that the travellers had seen for many a weary month, and the children seized on the dry, dusty, prickly leaves like the famished animals they really were.

Scarcely did they wait to extract the thorns ere they chewed the plant ravenously, exulting in the moisture that the effort produced in their parched mouths and swollen tongues.

Meanwhile, Rajamma had recovered from her long, death-like swoon, and as soon as she realised that there was some substitute for food at hand, she too made an effort to further rouse herself, and ate a few of the dirty flesh-like leaves of the prickly plant, that Eshwarah had come so far to obtain. Man and beast alike fed on the unwholesome plant, and then the whole party stretched themselves on the ground to rest.

None of them cared to speak. Indeed, what was there for them to talk about?

Iyerappa was afraid lest he should reveal the secret he had left behind him, and Eshwarah had exhausted his fund of remarks at the commencement of the journey.

The subject of the probable downcoming of the rain, and the planting of the fields, had long ago been talked over to the point of weariness. What other interest was there left to them in life? The rain meant food, and food just at that moment of time was certainly all that was worth living for.

The sun gradually declined westward, and the great heat of the day was once more a thing of the past, when Eshwarah roused himself, and in tones of inquiry addressed old Iyerappa, who cared not to make any further effort.

"Oh, friend Iyerappa, did you say you were in search of a food camp?"

"Thus did I speak, oh friend," came the indifferent reply.

"Then rise and search for that which you so ardently desire. If you squeeze a stick, will you get oil? If you lie there, will the food come to you?"

"I am weak and far spent. We will lie here until Yama¹ seeks us. He, at least, will draw near, though the food be far distant."

"I feel stronger for the rest of the day. Come, oh tired one! and together we will seek the place of food. For three weeks have I eaten of this green leaf, and I do not flourish like a poojaree. Look! I am bones, not flesh. I have a mind for curry and

¹ The god of death.

rice. Come! oh friend, come! Do not die without another struggle for life."

The cheery words of Eshwarah encouraged the old man, and he rose; but he leaned against the cart for support, and pleaded that he could not leave the woman and the four children to die alone, while they walked on in search of the unknown camp.

"I have a plan," said Eshwarah. "We will place the woman and her children within the shadow of the cart, and with some leaves to chew; they will be quite safe while we are away. Then, when we have found the food camp, we will return to them with food, and they will grow strong again once more."

Iyerappa listened, and in his weakness at last yielded to his companion's persuasive tone and manner.

Poor little Rajamma did not take in all that was told her of the men's plans, but yielded to being placed beneath the cart. The children understood better, and they kept assuring each other that father was going to look for food, which he would bring back for them to eat.

So the woman and the four children were left, and the two men started out on their further quest, the younger man supporting the tottering and more enfeebled steps of the elder one.

On they walked, without really knowing whither their steps were leading. When night had once more wrapped the land in solemn silence, they stopped, and both gave way to the fatigue that was upon them, and slept the sleep of outraged nature.

The morning of the second day broke with the

usual oppressive heat, and with its dawning light Eshwarah roused up, and shook off with determination the languor that threatened to overpower him. Then he turned to awaken Iyerappa, so that they might walk on yet a little farther in the prosecution of their search for food. But Iyerappa, the faithful husband and friend, needed no awakening, for Yama had drawn nigh and folded the weary old man in his strong arms of death.

Eshwarah turned sick with horror at the sight of the stiffened limbs and glazed, staring eyes of the form he had been lying so close to, probably for many hours.

He would lie down and yield himself up to the long, silent death sleep. No, no; he must get far away from the dead man, and he let out a scream of terror as two vultures suddenly appeared from apparently nowhere, and, swooping down upon the corpse of his friend, picked out the wide-open eyes with their strong beaks. Eshwarah waited to see no more. Fear of meeting with the same fate nerved him to move, and he walked on for nearly half a mile, till he fell, blind and fainting, upon the hot ground.

He came to himself some hours later, thinking he heard strange murmuring voices from some immense distance, and feeling the trickle, trickle of water down his throat. "We are only just in time to save him. Another few minutes and I think he must have died," said a voice with a foreign accent.

"We will lift him into the bandy, and take him back to the camp. Gently, gently; poor fellow, he

is only skin and bones, like so many of them," and the owner of the voice lifted the scholarly Eshwarah on to a soft mattress within one of the line of bullock carts that was waiting by the roadside.

It was twelve hours before Eshwarah recovered sufficiently to tell his rescuer, a missionary carrying grain through the famine-stricken district, about the death of old Iyerappa, and of the woman and four children left so far away under the shadow of the bullock cart.

A sweet-faced Englishwoman listened to the story, and hastened to the Dhorai with the news, begging that she with an ayah and a couple of men might start out at once on the chance of rescuing some of the forlorn little party.

But the missionary, knowing only too well the gruesome sights that famine had strewed all along the way, firmly refused her request, telling her that she should remain at the camp and attend to the wants of those already rescued, while he himself would again set out to try and find the spot described by Eshwarah. All night he travelled through the scorched and desolated country, and just as the sun was climbing overhead he came to the prickly pear patch.

"Too late," he murmured, as he drew near the cart and beheld no sign of life.

Then, alighting from his own bandy, he stooped to look beneath the cart, only to see a repetition of the sights that, alas! were becoming so common. There lay the once beautiful Rajamma cold and dead. A few feet from her was a new-born baby

that her motherly arms had never clasped. Close to her, two boys and a tiny girl lay quite unconscious, and later on the eldest girl was found lying face downwards amongst the prickly pear plants.

Very tenderly did the Englishman and his assistants minister to the needs of the four children, gently wooing them back from the very gates of death, and then carrying them away to the concentration camp, where for a few days they were nursed and fed, and then, with twenty other famine orphans, were sent on to the mission bungalow, where long rows of whitewashed sheds had been hastily erected for the shelter of these rescued children.

Iyerappa's and Rajamma's four children fought bravely for life through all the ills that followed their long months of starvation and their ravenous eating of the prickly pear leaves. Dysentery and skin diseases almost defied the skill of the missionary doctor and the nurses, who lovingly gave themselves to the care of these children for whom Christ died.

In the end, prayer and pains prevailed, and the four children grew well and strong. They were sent to the mission schools to be trained up in the faith of the Lord of Life and Glory, so that in the days to come they may go forth as messengers of the Cross to tell the story of Redeeming Love to their brothers and sisters who have not yet heard of the New and Living Way.

Eshwarah, to whom the children owed their lives, remained for many weeks at the camp, earning his daily food along with the thousands of others

gathered there. Daily, too, he listened to the missionaries, who preached of a Saviour who would feed with the Bread of Life souls that hungered after righteousness. He listened, ever keen and alert to put in a side word that should start some argument and draw the Dhorai, if possible, away from the simplicity of his story.

Apparently his soul was never stirred to respond to the tidings of great joy, for when the camp was broken up he returned to Adoni, physically strong and well, but with his spiritual eyes still holden because of the hardness of his heart.

CHAPTER VII
MUSIC HATH CHARMS

*“Blind Bartimæus, the son of Timæus, sat by the
highwayside begging.”—MARK x. 46.*

CHAPTER VII

MUSIC HATH CHARMS

CHIKKAPPA, the son of Doddappa, had not always sat by the highwayside begging, neither had he always been blind Chikkappa, for when first his baby eyes had blinked in the warm sunlight of his Indian village home, they had blinked to keep out the bright rays that were rather too strong for the first introduction to baby eyes.

The little lad had grown merry and bright, and learned to use his eyes to good purpose, until one hot season, when an unusually sharp attack of fever left them red and inflamed, and an attraction to the swarms of little black eye-flies, always so busily engaged in the work of public inoculation.

His father and mother did what they considered the best when they called in the barber, who with hot irons had seared the tender spot on the child's head where his brain was almost seen pulsating ; but, instead of coaxing the devil out at the door of the brain, it seemed as though the burning process had caused the impish inhabitant of the little lad to settle in his eyes, which grew worse and worse, until a bleared, unsightly mass of horrible matter covered the pretty dancing black eyes that had been so

useful to Chikkappa in the first few years of his life. Doddappa and his wife watched with the indifference of fatalism their son's eyesight gradually disappear, and no effort was made to save him from the blind man's life.

If Shiva had so willed the boy's future, well and good. Let it come or let it go, they were powerless in the matter, and why exert themselves to control or avert that which was certain to befall them. Besides, there was an older son. If Chikkappa had been their only hope, they might have taken him to the English doctor in Madras after the village doctor's fiery operations had failed. Then, too, they saw some chance of compensation in having a blind son, for not only were the Hindus charitably inclined, but the Mohammedans and even the English were moved with pity when they turned their eyes on the unsightly, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.

Thus, when Chikkappa was hopelessly blind, and very much disfigured by reason of his eyes being sunken in, and through the harsh measures used by the operating barber who had employed all his cunning arts in rendering the lad as pitiable an object as possible, Doddappa and his wife talked the situation over, with the result that they began to journey towards the great unknown world of Madras.

The few rupees they could gather together they spent on third-class railway tickets to Perambur, from whence they drifted into the heart of thickly-populated Blacktown, and soon the Googley knew one more blind beggar sitting by the highwyside

soliciting the pitying copper from the more fortunate possessor of eyes.

What a stream of blind there was! Men and women, boys and girls, and babies too, carried along by crippled mothers, or fastened to the backs of so-called fathers, who worked their way along on hands and knees.

At first, Chikkappa made but a poor beggar; and for many weeks he attracted small attention from the surging, hurrying crowds that all day long thronged the Googley. It was not long before his parents began to repent the step they had taken in leaving home and friends to become part and parcel of the bewildering Blacktown multitudes. They had hoped fondly for great gains from the hands of the blind boy, but night after night his father led him home from his begging-place near Tin Bazaar with scarcely the price of a meal in his emaciated little hand, much less the fabulous sums that he expected the blind lad to gather.

One day, while Chikkappa sat drearily by the wayside, straining his sightless eyeballs in fear at the confusion of sounds around him, and shrinking into as small a space as possible every time the shrill whistle of a passing tram smote upon his ears, an eager hand clutched his bare skinny arm, and a thick, unnatural voice bade him rise and do some business. The new-comer was a boy about Chikkappa's own age. He had eyes, to be sure, but his body was crooked and his mouth horribly mutilated. No one ever wanted a second glance into that beggar's mouth; for when he opened it to its fullest

extent, as a preliminary extractor of pity, it revealed such a chamber of horror that the passer-by was only too thankful to throw a coin to cause the hideous lips to close over the empty, roofless, tongueless cavern, widely displayed for his special benefit.

Chikkappa rose in passive obedience to the summons of the unknown one, who dragged him unceremoniously along till the boy judged that he must be close to some bullock carts, for suddenly a whip descended on his bare neck, and, in no uncertain tones, a harsh voice bade him "go."

The cripple had seen the uplifted whip of the coachman on the box-seat of the carriage he was approaching, and, letting go his grip of the blind boy's arm, he dodged the blow which Chikkappa received. The blind boy dodged too, but in the wrong direction, and down he went under the fore-legs of the horse.

The cripple was quick to take advantage of the slight accident, which had turned out much as he had planned. He opened his horrible mouth and let out an unearthly cry, that had the desired effect of making the English lady, who was bargaining with the bazaar-keeper, stop short in what she was saying, turn quickly round, and demand of the coachman what had happened. But it was not part of the cripple's trick to give the coachman an opportunity of explaining the position. Quick as lightning, he dragged the blind boy in front of the lady, and opening his own mouth to its most hideous extent, he began in the best English of which he was master, "Poor blind boy, Ma ; wicked horse kick poor blind

boy, Ma. No father, no mother. Poor blind boy, Ma," and with every long-drawn-out whine of the professional beggar he contrived to show the horrible emptiness of the cavity that served him for a mouth.

The lady shuddered at the double sight of horror the two companions in affliction presented, and with a recklessness born of her inexperience of Eastern beggars, she threw two rupees towards the wretched-looking suppliants.

With astonishing agility the cripple caught in the bend of his right elbow both the coins, thus revealing that his right hand was supplied at the wrist by only a pointed wedge of flesh.

Those two shining rupees, straight from the lucky white hand of the reckless Englishwoman, turned the tide of adversity into a prosperous channel for Chikkappa the blind beggar, and Chinnappa the cripple beggar.

From that day forth they became partners in distress, but distress that bade fair to pave the way to affluence.

Chinnappa served as eyes to Chikkappa, and as he led him about from one vantage ground to another, he taught him to use a few supplicating words of English, how to roll his sightless eyeballs to look their worst, how to pat his stomach to bring forth the hollow sound of emptiness, how to breathe so as to show every rib in his body, and lastly, how to dispose most cunningly of the coins that were bestowed upon them.

The boys did very little business during the early morning hours, and when the heat was greatest at

midday, they could always find some friendly, out-of-the-way shadow into which to creep for a rest before beginning their afternoon and evening's begging; for trade was brisk between the hours of four and six, when people of every shade of colour, from black to white, of many nationalities and varying religious beliefs, thronged the Googley in search of some curio, or otherwise desired possession, which, if the bazaar-keeper could not produce, he could find something else just as good, and, what was more to the point, he could by mild insinuations cajole the curio-hunter into buying something he did not want.

When night descended, and the discordant sounds of the Googley were hushed in the darkness, the boys returned home together; for Chinnappa, himself a homeless wanderer, had taken up his abode with Chikkappa's parents, who now began to be fairly prosperous on the united earnings of the two physically hideous lads, who were really the support of the family.

Day succeeded day, until the weeks stretched into years, and the two boys were men, stunted and emaciated in body, but still men in years and experience.

Chikkappa no longer shrank in terror from the noise and bustle around him; for he had long ago become, as it were, an integral part of the busy life that ebbed and flowed along the narrow, crowded streets of his favourite haunts.

Eating, drinking, sleeping, and begging filled up the measure of his darkened life. His soul lay dormant, his desires were earthward; with him to-

day was as yesterday and to-morrow would be just the same as all the days that had ever come and gone.

But one to-morrow was to dawn for Chikkappa, bringing in its train a new and endless delight, a never-failing source of quiet inward joy to him, who as a blind beggar had sat out the years of his youth and early manhood on the highwyside of an Eastern city.

It was the month of December, and the two men shivered slightly as the chill of evening settled over their accustomed haunts. They were on their way home after a successful day's begging. Chinnappa walked with less effort than blind Chikkappa, whose weary limbs almost refused to bear him along.

Past Tin Bazaar, along Popham's Broadway, round a corner, through the Blacktown Market, and out again into an open square, Chinnappa led the way. Chikkappa followed on with lagging footsteps, when all at once he was arrested by a sweet, plaintive sound floating towards him on the cold evening air. He stood perfectly still, listening with strained attention, and afraid to call out to his companion lest the sound of his voice should break upon the soft melody of the new and wondrous music. Chikkappa stood as long as the music lasted, and when that ceased he stood a little longer, still in a listening, expectant attitude, while a quiet, penetrating foreign voice began talking of many strange things that struck no responsive chord in the blind man's heart. Only the hope of hearing the music again kept him waiting, for how long he knew not, until aroused from his

inaction by the guttural voice of his friend Chinnappa, who had returned to seek and lead his blind companion home.

From that night, all through the cool season, the English missionary had a blind beggar as one of his most attentive listeners ; for Chikkappa never failed to take the way home that led past the spot where the street-preaching was being held.

Gradually the man crept closer and closer to the player of the wondrously sweet music, that he might drink in the sounds that had such a soothing effect upon his tired body. While the music lasted he never cared to listen to the voice that sounded far too foreign to cast any spell over him ; and when the music ceased he always lingered for the sake of hearing it over again when the preaching came to an end.

But one evening, when the hot weather was well advanced, a new voice began to speak in the open square, and to blind Chikkappa the voice had music in it, soft and alluring and arresting ; and so he was drawn on to listen to what was being said, until it gradually dawned upon him that the speaker was telling of how a man, blind like himself, and sitting day by day by the wayside begging for a few pies or a handful of grain, had quite suddenly received from some great guru the power to use his darkened eyes.

In a second of time Chikkappa's boyish days passed before him, and long-forgotten visions of men and women walking, of waving paddy fields, of shining water, and starlit skies, danced before him, and a great rushing longing for his eyesight took possession of him.

He rose from his crouching attitude, flung his arms out, and with a cry that reached the preacher's ears, besought, "Take me to him ; oh, take me to the great guru who gives blind people eyes to see with. I too am a blind beggar, and I want to see!"

Chikkappa never again sat by the wayside begging, for the missionary preacher took him to a follower of the Divine Physician, and all available human skill was brought to bear on the poor sightless physical eyes, which, however, never recovered from the neglect and awful treatment of his childhood.

Yet after many months of patient teaching, light streamed into his darkened soul, and in course of time the scales fell from his spiritual eyes, and in a higher and fuller sense he was able to say, "Whereas I was blind, now I see."

Chinnappa still begs his living in the neighbourhood of the Googley, and no persuasions from the companion of his boyhood's days are of any avail to lead him to forsake the mode of life that has been his from very babyhood, but he always allows himself a little recreation when he knows blind Chikkappa, with the violin that he has learned to play so sweetly, will be standing in the open square, and taking his part in the street-preaching carried on by the European missionary. Thither the cripple resorts, but the gospel message seems to have no power to rouse his dormant mind.

Chikkappa believes his cup of joy will run over one day, and that day will be when his friend of adverse darkened days shall become his brother in Christ.

CHAPTER VIII
THE VILLAGE IDOLS

“ Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not ; eyes have they, but they see not. They have ears, but they hear not ; noses have they, but they smell not ; they have hands, but they handle not ; feet have they, but they walk not ; neither speak they through their throats.”—Ps. cxv. 4-7.

CHAPTER VIII

THE VILLAGE IDOLS

A MODERN missionary on a modern bicycle was panting with exertion and streaming with perspiration as he made his machine almost fly over the stretch of white dusty road lying between himself and the village he wanted to reach before sunset. This was to be his last preaching station for that night, and his only hope of being able to carry the gospel to that particular place, just once in the year opening up before him, lay in his trusty bicycle carrying him there in time to reach the villagers as they returned from their evening's toil, and then in taking him back to his camp, where his tent was pitched and carts were in readiness to move the camp on with daylight the next morning. From an opposite direction, and meeting the cyclist, walked with noiseless steps two barefooted boys, sons of the idol-maker to the village the missionary was trying to reach.

Already the brothers were of an age to help their father in his handicraft. All day they had been busy doing their part in the manufacture of numberless clay images of Ganesa ; for a special feast was being held during the forthcoming week in honour of that

specially ugly little deity. The idol-maker's orders had been almost too numerous for him to fulfil, for every villager wanted a new representation of their favourite god for the festival day.

Madhri and Govinda were, even then, each carrying two of these images to a little out-of-the-way village across the fields, when they first caught sight of the moving wheels and the figure astride them.

"My brother, what can it be?" gasped Govinda, in real alarm.

"Alas! alas! how can I tell? I never saw anything like it before. I am glad it is still daylight. Oh Ganesa, Ganesa!" he ejaculated, and pressing one of the clay images too tightly, in his fervour, he flattened its trunk out of all shape; for, under pressure of orders, the idol-maker had failed to thoroughly dry his images before sending them to their purchasers. Here was a new cause for consternation, and while they paused to examine the mischief they had wrought, the missionary wheeled on with determination stamped on every feature, when bump went the bicycle over a sharp-edged stone, which in his speed he had just failed to avoid, and the hitherto easy-going machine dragged heavily in deepest sympathy with the wounded back tyre.

Here was a hindrance; and the greatly-longed-for village, three miles away, to say nothing of the camp ten miles in the rear of the dusty road already traversed.

The young fellow alighted, and with rueful face examined the wheel of the bicycle that had done him such yeoman service all through his six weeks' tour.

"It's no use attempting to patch it up in this out-of-the-way place, even if the damage is not almost beyond repair. Poor old tyre! I've used you badly, and no mistake, but this last tear is a climax," and the missionary rider pursed his lips into a very long-metre whistle as he contemplated the ruin worked by that sharp-edged stone right in his pathway.

He had been so intent on his examination as to be unaware of the approach of the two lads, who with deft fingers had patted and moulded Ganesa's long trunk back into shape before the missionary's whistle of arrested purpose was finished, and still muttering "Ganesa, Ganesa, Ganesa," as a charm against evil, they tried to pass at a safe distance the missionary and his useless bicycle.

But the young Englishman hailed them with the greatest satisfaction, for it was a distinct relief to his feelings to have someone to speak to at that very moment of dire disaster.

"Salaam, little brothers! How are you to-day?" he said.

But they were dumb with surprise and fear, and Govinda made a dash past to escape the questioning blue eyes of the stranger. In quickening his steps, he jerked against his brother, who was also intent upon hurrying by, with the result that both of them fell against the upturned bicycle.

Throwing out their arms to save themselves, they loosened their hold upon the clay images they were carrying, and these too mingled with the dust, the bicycle, and their own sprawling limbs.

It was all done so quickly and so naturally that the unconscious object of the lads' fear burst out into a good-natured laugh, while he tried to say, "Bravo! I could not have done it better myself."

"There must be a demon in that two-wheeled thing," panted Madhri, as he extricated himself from the confusion, to find his hands empty and his images broken, and the white-faced stranger tenderly picking up the bicycle, and making inquiries as to the extent of the damage the lads had sustained.

"Alas! alas! now this is really too bad for my horse and carriage to have caused you so much trouble. Your gombai,¹ too, is quite smashed. Was it a little plaything for your baby sister?" he asked, affecting an ignorance that was not his; for he soon recognised the fragments of broken clay as parts of the elephant-headed Ganesa.

Horse and carriage indeed! Now Govinda and Madhri were sure that the stranger must be out of his mind to call a mere pair of wheels a carriage, and to refer to a horse that was quite invisible to their eyes. But if he were insane he must also have some unexplained mystery about him, or else how could he know there was a little baby sister at home, who really did get possession of some of the idols their father made. Especially was she fond of the little gold, silver, and bronze images of Krishna that occasionally a wealthy Brahmin ordered for his household. The brightness of the gold and silver attracted her sharp eyes, and appealed to her small mind as a desirable morsel for her little round

¹ Doll.

mouth. Quickly these thoughts passed through the boys' minds, but their mouths remained closed, and so the foreigner continued : " Now, I daresay you never saw such a horse and carriage as this. Well, you see, this is the carriage where I sit," and he jumped lightly on the saddle, gave a few turns to the pedals, and alighted again. " My horse is inside the wheels. You can't see it at present ; but it is the grandest little pony out, especially if I feed it well, with plenty of wind, and just a little, a very little, oil. Like this, do you see," and he began vigorously pumping up the disabled tyre, the boys standing meanwhile thoroughly diverted with the young man's talk and actions.

As fast as he pumped air into the punctured tube it came out, to the accompaniment of a running commentary on the mysteries of an English bicycle.

But the man at the wheel was gaining his object in making the boys feel more comfortable in his presence, and he wanted very much to lead them on to talk about the broken images.

" Is there anything alive inside it ? " at last blurted out Govinda.

" Alive ! Oh no."

" Then what makes it move ? "

" I make it move, when I jump on, and turn the wheels with my feet."

" But it knocked me down, and then sat on me, and smashed up the gombais," said the excited lad, retreating a few steps from the dread machine.

" Oh no, little brother, you knocked the bicycle down and let the gombais fall from your hands.

What were you doing with so many gombais? Let us pick them up, and see if we can mend them."

"Alas! no, they cannot be mended. We must hurry back to the village, and get others made, or the people to whom we were carrying them will be very angry, and will have no gods for their pooja to-morrow."

It was now the missionary's turn to show astonishment, as he echoed the boy's words, "Gods! pooja! Do you worship these little idols? Are they your gods?"

"Ah no," explained Govinda, the elder, a really intelligent boy, "these are not gods yet, but they will be to-morrow, after the priest has said mantrams, and invoked the spirit of the god to descend into the image. Then as long as the spirit of the god is in these little idols our father makes, the idol is really a god, and the people do pooja to it. Do you understand?"

"Ah yes, I see. What a pity, though, the priest had not asked the spirit to take up its abode in the gombais before you started, as then it could have walked from one village to the next, and would not have got smashed up in this dreadful fashion," remarked the young man innocently.

"Oh no, sir, you make a mistake. Even when the spirit of the god is within the image, it cannot move. The people who worship it have to carry it about just the same as before the spirit enters into it."

"Then its legs are of no use to it? I thought legs were to run and walk with. But I see your

image that is going to be a god has a mouth, ears, eyes, and nose, so perhaps it has a use for them, even though it cannot use its legs."

"That is right, sir; our poojaree tells us to bring cocoanuts and fruit for the god to eat, and flowers for it to smell, and we always play the tom-toms when there is a festival on; so, of course, the gombai must like to hear the music."

Thus the talk went on between the missionary and the idol-maker's sons, and before the three parted, the lads had received a new conception of a God who was a Mighty Spirit, and who could be confined by no priestly invocation, within images of gold and silver, bronze or clay, the work of men's hands.

The Ganesa festival was over. Govinda and Madhri had enjoyed their share in the holiday-making, and now they were taking a further holiday from work, because trade was less brisk than before the festival.

Their father was asleep on the house pial, and the lads were basking in the hot afternoon sun. Apparently they too were dozing, but without any warning Govinda carefully raised his head to make sure his brother was asleep, and then crawling close up to his ear, placed his mouth to it, and let out a discordant sound in imitation of a crow.

In a second Madhri had done exactly what Govinda had expected of him. He was on his feet in consternation, only to be stopped by a chuckling laugh from his brother, who said, "Ah! I'd rather have you than any of the gods in this village; you

can hear the sound of a crow, and can jump up and move away if you want to. I have been round all the gods, and shouted as loudly as I could, and I can't make one of them move, or shrink in the least."

"Hush! hush! Be quiet, Govinda, my brother. If anyone hears you talk against the gods in that way, they will say you have a devil within you, and oh! Govinda, do you think that white man who talked to us last week was a white devil, and not a man at all? You say such strange things since then, and you never used to trouble yourself whether our gods could see, or hear, or smell, or walk. Now you are always thinking about it, and talking of it," and the young lad's bright eyes dilated with fear as he moved a step farther away from the brother who might possibly be devil-possessed; but Govinda was quick-witted, and as Madhri moved, he clutched his little brother's bare arm, and gave it a sharp, mischievous pinch, which evoked a shrill scream of pain from the one boy, and a delighted cry of triumph from the other.

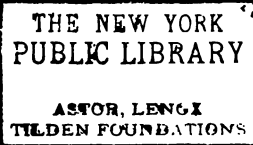
"Oh! Oh! Oh! Madhri, you can feel, and scream out for such a little pinch as that, and big Basavana never makes a sound, no matter how I kick and kick at his stone sides."

"Alas, my Govinda! surely you did not kick big Basavana to try and make him scream with pain. If you do such dreadful things, I shall be afraid to go out with you, lest the gods get angry with you, and punish us both."

"How can they punish us, when they can't take



VILLAGE IDOLS



care of themselves?" asked the more advanced Govinda.

"But you never thought of these things until that strange man met us, the day before Ganesa's festival, and talked of a new God of whom we had never heard."

"True, true, oh brother, and I only wish he were here now to tell us more of his God. His words were good to listen to. Hearing what he said set me thinking, and the more I think about our gods, the more useless I find them"; but the words were hardly out of the boy's mouth when he was interrupted by the advance of a stately white bull down the narrow street, followed by a delighted throng of admiring children. The creature had a wreath of flowers round its neck, and walked as though fully conscious of the devout and sacred feelings the sight of it inspired in the breast of the villagers. The bull passed on its way, and the brothers joined the other children in their games, apparently forgetting their talk about the useless idols that they helped their father to manufacture.

But if Madhri forgot, Govinda did not; for all the while he was so earnestly at play up and down the narrow, dirty, uneven streets of the village, he was concocting quite a nice little trial test for the idol gods, and, if possible, he meant to put it into execution that very night. If Madhri would take part in his expedition, well and good; if not, he would brave all the known and unknown dangers by himself.

He had already bought half a cocoanut and some

limes, and with these he intended making an offering to a few of the village idols to see if they would respond to his appeal to show themselves human as well as divine. "If they are really the gods the priests say they are, it will be quite easy for them to eat the cocoanuts and the limes," he thought.

Darkness set in; there was no moon, and Govinda's daring scheme did not seem so easy to carry through in the darkness alone as it did when playing in the bright sunshine with all the noisy boys and girls of the village, so he brought all his persuasive eloquence to bear on his younger brother, and once again his stronger will triumphed over Madhri's scruples, and, supper being over, the two crept secretly away on what appeared to Madhri an unholy errand.

First of all, they arrived at a small wayside shrine, where in a beehive-like enclosure an ugly little image of Ganesa was ensconced. A brass vessel containing a wick and oil was placed in front of the idol. The light from the lamp revealed a freshly-placed wreath of jasmine round the little deformity's body, and also made it quite easy for Govinda to hold the cocoanut beneath the god's mouth, while in gentle and coaxing tones he murmured, "Oh Ganesa, Ganesa, eat of my nut. Thou must be hungry. Eat, eat of this sweet food."

Silence all around, and no responsive movement from Ganesa. Govinda repeated his appeal, waited, and coaxed again, with no happier result. Then a happy thought took possession of him, and he cried out, "Madhri, take up the lamp; perhaps he can't

see: his trunk is so far away from his eyes, perhaps he can't see what I am holding under it."

But Madhri's heart was bumping at too tremendous a rate to obey such an order, so, instead of doing what he was told, he shrank behind the shrine, and left Govinda to do his own work. And Govinda was not slow to do it, either; for when he saw Madhri disappear, he picked up the lamp, and held it slantingly under the idol's eyes, not noticing that the oil was slowly trickling all over the form of the revered Ganesa, until the wick spluttered feebly and finally went out.

"It is certainly true that Ganesa neither saw the light, wanted to eat the cocoanut, nor felt the warm oil trickling over his face. I'd like to pour some hot ghee¹ over Madhri. I know he would take plenty of notice of it," mused the lad, as he summoned his brother from his hiding-place to accompany him to the next god who was on trial.

Basavana, whose hard sides he had already kicked in his preliminary investigations, he passed sorrowfully by, for the poojaree lay across the front of the temple fast asleep. Durgamma, too, he was forced to omit, for the priestesses were still awake, and chanting their dirge-like songs as they moved backwards and forwards performing the temple rites before this "mother of evil"; but the shrine of Hanumantha, the monkey god, was left to the silence of night, so there the boys paused, and repeated their tests of offering the food to be eaten by the monkey's mouth that could not produce a

¹ Clarified butter.

sound, only to be assured, by the non-success of their efforts, that, as far as eating, drinking, and smelling were concerned, that god too, which they knew their own father had fashioned, was a useless creation.

"Come, Madhri, let us go home. It is no use trying any more: they are all alike. I wish I could find out a god who could hear when I speak to him and see when I am offering him a present," said poor disappointed Govinda.

"That white man who could make the wheels move when he sat across them, promised to come back, and teach us more about the one he called the 'Living God.' I'm alive, and I can move and hear, talk and eat. Govinda, my brother, do you think," and his voice sank to an intense whisper, "do you think these gods are dead?" It was a stupendous suggestion that had not presented itself to the more brilliant Govinda, but he unhesitatingly grasped at the idea thrown out by his brother.

"Yes, yes, Madhri, you are right. That is it: they are all dead, and dead people are of no value. How quickly we burn up the bodies of the dead. Let us find out the white preacher, and hear all about his 'Living God.'"

But alas! the white man was far away, carrying his gospel message in other directions, and there was no one within a radius of hundreds of miles who had ever heard or thought of such a distinction as a dead god or a "Living God."

"How shall they hear without a preacher?"

CHAPTER IX
SEETA RAMA'S BOOK

"The entrance of Thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple."—Ps. cxix. 130.

CHAPTER IX

SEETA RAMA'S BOOK

THE time for observing the Swinging Festival drew near, and parties of pleasure-seekers were being made up in hundreds of villages in the Ballapura district.

Months before these revels were enacted, men and women, as well as children, looked forward with the joy of keen anticipation to all the delights in store for them, if they should be so fortunate as to be able to be present at the great merry-making. There were new cloths for the women, with perhaps the additional glory of a few borrowed jewels from less fortunate neighbours, who could not attend the tamasha; there were sweetmeats, luscious lengths of sugarcane, new glass bangles, and other endless delights for the boys and girls, and a great time of carousing and free licence for the men.

Seeta Rama, of the village of Kalluru, with his wife and mother, a few young lads of his family, and several neighbours, clubbed together to hire a bullock cart, which should help them to perform the week's journey that separated their village from the scene of the festival in Ballapura.

Arriving there on the very morning of the festival,

they found the great town crowded to its utmost ; and it was with difficulty they at last succeeded in camping under a tree opposite Durgamma's temple.

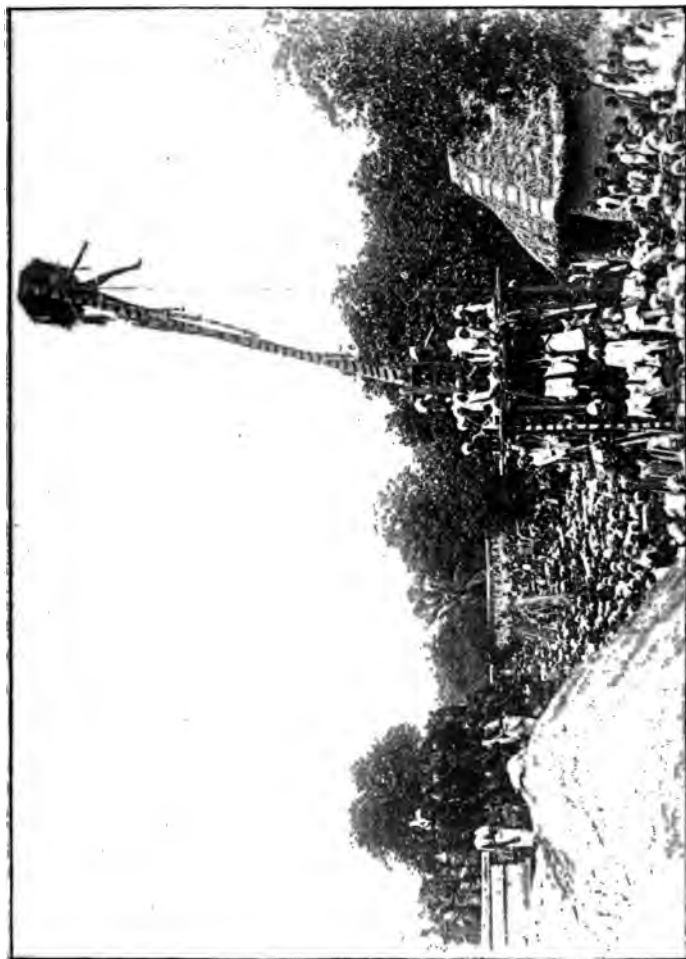
The women prepared savoury meals, over which they managed to do a good amount of gossip, and to indulge in not a few quarrels with their neighbours. Between their hours of labour they mingled freely with others, who, like themselves, were on pleasure bent.

Seeta Rama was young and high-spirited, and entered into the fun, the jests, the ribaldry, and almost every licence of body and soul that the occasion allowed.

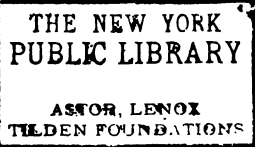
He drank freely of the toddy¹ to be had all over the town ; was conspicuous by the deep red stains all over his loin cloth and turban. He swaggered round with a little bamboo cane in his hand, and even spent a few pies in buying some cheap cigarettes that he might the better imitate some of the lordly young Brahmins who graced the festival in a supercilious, condescending sort of fashion.

The sun had sunk behind the mountains in the west, and the last frantic shouts of the devotees were dying away as the white bullocks yoked to the festival car completed their last round of the temple, when Seeta Rama was attracted by a quiet-looking man dressed in a white cloth and a linen coat. He had noticed him several times during the day, as he sold books and gave away leaflets amongst the thousands who thronged the great compound where the tamasha was being celebrated.

¹ The fermented sap of the cocoanut palm.



IN HONOUR OF DURGAMMA



The young man, half intoxicated with toddy and pleasure, wondered what additional fun was to be had from the books, and so, amidst the laughs, jokes, and jests of his boisterous companions, he began bargaining with the seller of books for the last one in his possession.

"I'll give you a pie for your little book, Appa," he bawled out.

"No, no, my son. 'Tis a very precious book. The price is three annas, and I cannot sell it for less."

"Precious, do you call it? Then 'tis like rain in the time of drought. Come, let me have your wonderful book for an anna, my last precious possession," and he winked knowingly as he played on the word "precious," and at the same time tripped up a lad near him, who fell headlong to the ground amidst the outburst of loud laughter.

But Yohanappa, the Bible colporteur, would not part with his last Testament for an anna, to a man who apparently had plenty to spend on toddy and arrack.

Then Seeta Rama felt in every fold of his loin cloth, and in his turban, but no money could he find. The only fruit yielded by his search was three little cigars, and amidst the half-drunken merriment of the party he offered these in addition to the anna as payment for the book, which, now that it seemed out of his reach, became a very much coveted possession. To the surprise of all, Yohanappa accepted the cigars as part payment for the book, which he placed in Seeta Rama's outstretched hands, telling him as he did so that there was death

in those innocently-rolled cigars, but life, life everlasting was to be found by those who sought diligently within the covers of the little book.

"Read it, oh my friend," he concluded; "open your ears to all it says to you, think over its words, and you will surely discover a new way wherein you may walk."

"Open your ears," laughed Seeta Rama, pulling at the ears of several who stood near; and apparently that was the only sentence of Yohanappa's that impressed him.

The festival had come to an end, and the little party organised by Seeta Rama started homeward, all of them poorer in pocket, with little to show for the free expenditure of their hard-earned money, some, nay most of them, lower in the scale of morality than when they set out to attend the orgies connected with the annual "swinging" to propitiate the bloodthirsty Durga, wife of Shiva, the divine despot of the Hindu.

The bullock cart jogged slowly on during the long hot day. Sometimes the men walked, and now and again the women were glad to stretch their cramped limbs, after hours of sitting curled up in the cart. It was dull work after all the gaiety and fun of the past yesterdays. Seeta Rama trudged on, his spirits suffering a reactionary depression, till suddenly he remembered the book he had tucked under the straw in the cart. Delighted at the thought of being able to show off his superior abilities to his companions, he proposed a halt under a wayside tree, while, as a diversion from the monotony of the

journey, he would read to them from the book that was to show them all a "New Way."

His proposition was hailed with delight, and soon, lying about in various attitudes of repose, the returning pleasure-seekers were listening to the first chapter of St. Mark's Gospel.

Listening! well, not exactly; for some of them went to sleep, for the hum of Seeta's voice acted like a lullaby, and none of them understood a word of what was being read, not even the self-conscious reader himself; for he was too much engrossed with his own importance in being the only one present who could make out the mysterious characters which covered the pages of the open book.

It took a week to reach Kalluru, almost a day longer than it had taken the party to go to Ballapura; for Seeta Rama had taken up a part of every day in reading to his friends and companions. Slowly and laboriously he had completed the reading of the whole of the Gospel of Mark, and by the time the mud walls of his native village were in sight he had a suggestion to make to his companions in travel; for within his own heart there had sprung the faintest glimmer of interest with regard to the man "Yesu"¹—the wonderful teacher, who seemed to be the central figure of all the new strange stories he had read. Ere they parted, he said, "Oh friends, this book from which I have been reading is indeed a wonderful book. It appears to be full of many more good words, though the teaching is truly hard to be understood. Come often to my pial, and we

¹ Jesus.

will read more of these words concerning the man Yesu, who comes to me more in the form of God than man."

"We will come, oh Seeta Rama," they promised in concert.

Thus it came to pass that several times during every week those Hindu villagers, worshippers of almost any and every material object that crossed their path, used to gather round Seeta Rama, and listen in the cool of the evening to the stories of One whose gentle words, healing touch, and gracious teaching began to lay hold of their hearts and lives.

The constant repetition made the stories very familiar, and in the hearts of some of the hearers there sprang up the tiny mustard-seed of faith in the great unseen God, who had sent such a teacher as Jesus into the world.

Two years passed by, and Seeta Rama, the self-constituted teacher of a Spirit-taught Christianity, died, leaving to his friend, old Mallappa, the precious book from which he had learned to walk in the "New and Living Way."

He had suffered no persecution; for the simple villagers among whom he lived and taught knew nothing of Christianity *versus* Hinduism, and Seeta had not advanced far enough in the "New Way" or learned enough to cause him to so alter the way of his life as to bring down the wrath of the priests, or of the opulent guru who periodically came round to the village to gather his dues, and in return to impart his blessing.

Meanwhile, another two years had run their course

and in the far-away heathen village there had grown up, without the aid of missionary or teacher, quite a little community of Bible students, so that when a European missionary passed that way, pitched his tents outside the village walls, and prepared himself for a week's sowing of the gospel seed, he found, to his amazement, the ground ploughed, planted, harrowed, and watered, and a small congregation of followers of Jesus, the Great Teacher, living in the simplicity of the Christian life as they had conceived it from the reading of the gospel story, wholly unfettered by the doctrines, dogmas, and creeds formulated by the thinking minds of Western lands.

For a week the missionary's tent became the place of instruction and encouragement.

Mallappa, his wife and sons, and some half-dozen neighbours, gathered together nightly to learn more accurately of the way of life.

So ripe in Christian truths did the old man appear, that the missionary broached to him the subject of baptism, explaining fully to him the meaning of the rite in the Christian Church, and putting before him the privileges and honour of being a member of Christ's Church upon earth, rather than continuing in the position of a secret disciple.

"Ah no," said the thoughtful old man, "the Dhorai does not understand. I am no secret disciple like some we read of, who for fear of the Jews held back from confessing Jesus to be the Son of the Living God. All the village knows of the Jesus Veda that I read and love. I have Christ. Why do I need baptism? In the stories of John the

Baptist there is much said about baptism truly, but John was not the Son of God, and when many curious people came asking him questions, and trying to find out all about him and his work, he told them of One mightier, greater, more wonderful than himself, One who was yet to come. Did he not say, The One who comes after me is greater than I. I am one unworthy even to carry His sandals. He will give to you the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and of fire. So that your mind may be renewed, I indeed baptize you with water, but He will do for you more than this. So then, while we have Christ, is there any need that we should go back to the baptism of water?"

Surely the old man had grasped a great truth, that to have Christ in him, the hope of glory, was more than all the rites and ceremonies of a thousand churches.

The missionary thought so, and decided to leave the question of baptism for the time being; and so he moved on to his next village, and the little band of Christians, like the Bereans of old, went on searching the Scriptures to see whether those things whereof he had spoken were so or no; with the result that the little community grew, and many believed in the True and Living God, of whom their fathers had never so much as heard.

But as heavy storm-clouds will gather after an unusually blue sky and brilliant sunshine, so Mallappa's days of peaceful study and serenity of mind were to be darkened by storms and tempests that were to rob him of home, wife, children, and—for a

few dark days of anguish and tribulation—his hitherto childlike trust in Jesus, the Divine Son of the Living Father.

The hot season was drawing to a close, when one day, Mallappa, his wife, and sons, were all at work in the cotton field. Suddenly a little lad came running breathlessly into the midst of the toilers to say the fire god was walking abroad, and that Mallappa, the Bible-reader's house, was in flames. Everyone paused in his work, and turning his eyes in the direction of the village, found the lad's words were only too true; for immense clouds of smoke were ascending from the direction in which the houses were clustered together. In consternation, they ceased work, and turned to run homewards, each one filled with apprehension as to the fate of his own little shelter. But only Mallappa and his family suffered that day from the casual visit of the fire demon; for the little breeze that was needed to fan the flames and set the whole village on fire never sprang up.

It was just before the burning down of Mallappa's house that the Brahmins had begun to look with suspicion upon the old man, and to say strange things about him and his small following of Bible readers. To them belonged all the rights of priestcraft, and not knowing exactly why, they resented, with all the arrogance of their caste, the ignorant old Mallappa setting himself up as a new teacher of new and strange doctrines, that were quite contrary to all they taught. Few amongst them troubled to ask themselves if they sincerely believed what they did teach.

Thus, rumours began to be afloat amongst the simple villagers that the deities, whom they feared rather than revered, had marked out Mallappa and his company of friends for destruction; and that, as a preliminary step towards that end, they had caused a shower of sparks to fall on the dry thatch of his hut, consuming it, and it alone, as an indication of the destroying nature of their wrath.

The whispers reached Mallappa, who smiled well content, for the very day of the fire he had carried his precious Veda out to the field with him, that when his midday meal was over he might further study it.

So, though home and the few poor articles it contained had been destroyed, his book remained with him still; and while he had his Bible, his faith looked up and beyond the trials of the fire.

Three days after the fire, Mallappa's second great trouble befel him, for, with hasty and insidious fingers, death snatched away his wife, between himself and whom a strong love had sprung up, a love born of their mutual trust and faith in the Great Teacher they had discovered for themselves.

The poor old man was bowed to the earth with grief, as the waves and billows of his sorrow passed over him. His old Hindu beliefs came thronging back, as he looked upon the dead face of the one who had been a faithful wife to him from the day he took her, a thirteen-year-old bride, from her father's house.

She had never failed to cook his rice, prepare his bath, work side by side with him in the fields, and

do her duty as a mother in giving him sons to follow in his steps. But the house where his fathers had lived for so long was consumed, and now the mistress had followed. Her life had gone out like the wick of a lamp whose oil is exhausted. Dark thoughts held him in deadly grip, till the hope that had been his, of life eternal in the palaces above, prepared for him by the everlasting Son of the Father, died down to the tiniest spark. Though it died down so low, the light flickered on, and did not go out entirely. To all the sneers and innuendoes of his Hindu neighbours he answered bravely, even while his heart quivered fearfully, "I will still trust in the Lord my God."

But Mallappa's heaviest trial was yet in the future. Since the fire, and the death of his wife, he and his sons had been obliged to take shelter in a disused hut at the extreme edge of the village, behind which was a rocky stretch of country, harbouring many snakes that were objects of great reverence to the villagers.

A month after his wife's death, the men were working at a greater distance than usual, and the darkness of night had overtaken them ere they reached home. The women, too, had lingered behind in the bazaar to buy in some little condiments for their evening meal; and so it happened that Rama, Mallappa's firstborn son, was the first to push back the half-closed door of the hut, and step across the threshold. As he opened the door, something fell with a soft thud at his feet, and an angry hiss sounded forth, followed by a piercing shriek

from the poor lad, into whose bare foot an infuriated cobra had struck its fangs, and injected the thin, blue poisonous fluid, that meant almost instantaneous death to its victim.

Rapidly the poison did its deadly work, and while the villagers filled the air with their wailings and cries, Mallappa looked again on the face of his dead, and bowed his head in desolation and woe, crying out in the bitterness of his spirit that the gods of his youth and of his village were indeed pursuing him with dire vengeance, and the Great God, in whom he had put all his trust, had surely forsaken him, and left him as a prey to the huntsman.

For days and weeks he shut himself up in his desolate home while he wrestled with the darkness of his pursuing fate.

He avoided his neighbours, for he dared not look them in the face or put himself in the way of hearing their taunts and sneers, or recommendations to return to the temple worship, and resume his old habits of doing pooja to the many gods with which the village abounded.

Day succeeded day, and the weeks multiplied, while the darkness of his soul deepened as he wrestled with, and well-nigh yielded to, the temptation of the hour. He was dwelling in thick shadows, with eyes blinded and soul shrouded to the Light of Life, and ears deafened to the sound of the voice of Love. He never opened the Bible that once had been so precious ; but sat on alone, cut off from all companionship, trying to think out his own misery. His remaining children and his grandchildren coaxed



“ON HER HEAD A BASKET OF TAMARIND”

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him to rouse himself from his sorrow, but they had no power with the old man, whose hour of sore tribulation was upon him.

Then one day a tiny struggling sunbeam fell aslant his bare legs, and Mallappa knew all about it, even with his eyes shut, for its kiss made him open his heavy, sorrow-stricken eyes to see what the unusual caress meant. The sunbeam seemed to smile at him bewitchingly, and as it forced itself through a tiny crevice in the window of his soul, straightway old Mallappa experienced a great longing for warmth, a sight of the green paddy fields and the great blazing sun.

The dancing sunbeam had accomplished its mission; for, without a second thought, the old man rose, passed out of his darkened room, and walked mechanically down the street into the bazaar, where he was met by a young woman carrying on her head a basket of tamarind, and in her arms a fine fat, sturdy boy. Of late she had been a frequent listener to Mallappa as he read the Bible to his small congregation, and so she stopped to accost the old man with a ring of real pleasure in her liquid voice.

"Salaam, oh Mallappa! Where have you been these many days, that we have not seen you abroad or heard you reading from your holy book?"

"Ask me not, oh my daughter; anguish and sorrow have been my portion. House, wife, son have gone. What is there left for me now?"

"Alas! alas! do you talk that way when you still have your Yesu Swami, your God. Has He

left you, or are you going to give Him up now that you are in grief? Is He a God for days of plenty and not for years of famine? What becomes of the sun, oh Mallappa, when the rain-clouds gather and the monsoon breaks? Have you forgotten the last lesson you gave us out of the Bible, how Job, the man who trusted God, lost everything, and then how God gave it back to him many times over?"

Mallappa was silent; for once the teacher was being taught, and his interrogator continued: "What was it his wife said to him in the day of his great trouble?" and the girl paused to set down her basket so as to administer a reproof to the heavy boy, who, taking advantage of his mother's inattention to himself, had pulled her hair down in his endeavour to get some of the sweet tamarind from her basket.

The reply came readily to the parched lips of the old Bible student. "Curse God and die," was the fearful and slow answer, as the speaker realised how near he had approached that awfully perilous point of cursing the One who in love had chastened him.

"Did he do it?" asked the girl; and she answered her own query: "Not if the story you read us is true. He still clung to the One True God. He trusted Him, believed Him, and worshipped Him."

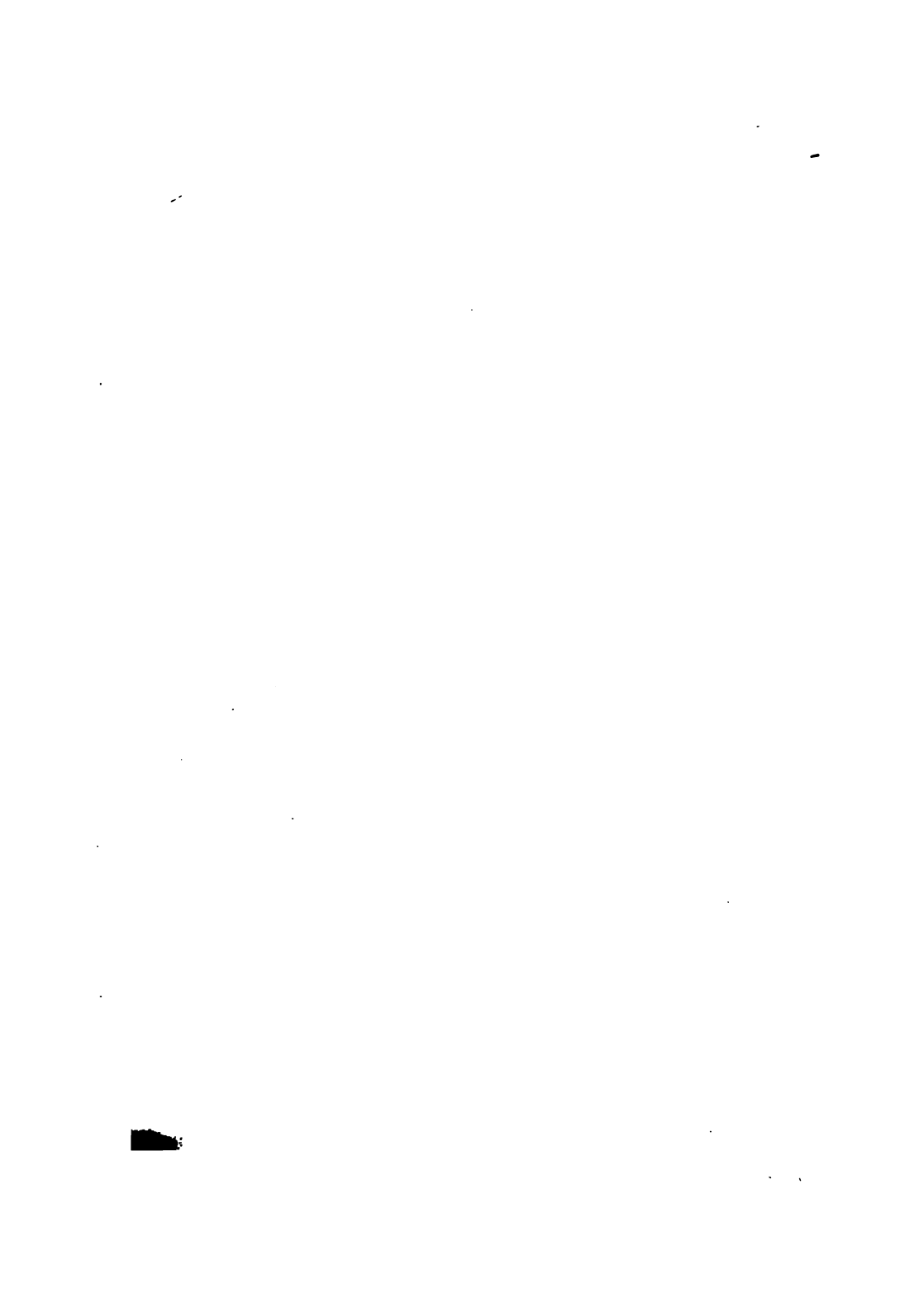
Mallappa had got his message. The mists had rolled away from his spiritual eyes, and he beheld as in a vision the compassionate face of the Son of Love bending over him in pitying tenderness.

He raised his stooping figure, and, looking upwards, saw his crown of glory as he stretched out his hands

and made his declaration: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."

The girl picked up her basket and her baby, and moved away in silent awe, marvelling that her words, spoken more in jest than in earnest, should have had the power to bring such a transforming light into old Mallappa's face.

Many years have run their course. Seeta Rama, Mallappa, the Bible colporteur, and the missionary have all passed into the unseen world to join in grateful adoration and triumphant praise at the feet of Him who is King of kings, Lord of lords, a great God above all gods, the entrance of whose words into Seeta Rama's heart had brought enlightenment of soul to many untaught Hindu villagers.



CHAPTER X
AT THE VULTURE'S GATE

“Behold, there was a man named Zaccheus, which was chief among the publicans, and he was rich.”—LUKE XIX. 2.

“A publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom.”—LUKE V. 27.

CHAPTER X

AT THE VULTURE'S GATE

ABU TALEB, the rich Mohammedan money-lender of Kalluru, had various methods of making his accumulated rupees yield as rich a harvest as possible.

Outwardly devout, as far as anyone else knew, he was a true worshipper of the One God and of Mahomet His prophet, but within the shrine of his inner being, out of sight of prophets and teachers, known only to himself, but suspected by all with whom he had business transactions, there was raised an altar to the idol that perhaps has the greatest number of devotees the wide world over, for Christian and pagan alike vie with each other in doing homage to the god of wealth.

Undoubtedly Abu's god was represented by gold, or its equivalent.

His outer garments of snowy purity looked very fair to the admiring world of Kalluru, but those same costly white robes were too often the garments of oppression and extortion.

The rich man in his luxury cared not that the curse of the widow and the orphan was hurled at him in secret by thousands from whom his agents

extorted unjust dues. It did not trouble him that dying, famine-stricken men, listening to the exorbitant price he asked for his stored-up grain, muttered with their final gasps a prayer for vengeance upon the man who could eat, smile, and grow rich, while they in their poverty were ground down and oppressed till they yielded their all into the widely-gaping money-bags of the richest man they knew.

Then, in the desperation of hunger, having given their all for a last few grains of rice or cholum, they struggled no longer for a pitiful existence, but in dumb despair lay and waited for black-winged death to overshadow them and bear them away. Where? They knew not, nor in their physical suffering cared.

Perhaps Abu did not know how many wished him ill, and it is certain he did not give a second thought to the blessings or the cursings of the people as a whole so long as his agents carried out his directions, which always tended in the line of an increased banking account.

It was very hard to tell in Kalluru who was not an agent of Abu's, for his representatives were everywhere and took part in all sorts of unholy transactions to heap up treasure in the storehouse of their master, whose face was set like brass by reason of his devotion to the god of gold.

Two of them were a brilliant pair of rascals who conceived a plan for fattening up a useless cream pony, selling it at a great profit, and then, when the purchaser found out its worthlessness, buying it back at a greatly reduced rate, so getting the pony once more into their own possession, to be palmed off as a

wonderful bargain upon the next innocent European who should be in need of just such a good article in horse flesh. To aid in this nefarious piece of trade, Abu advanced the men ten rupees to effect the first purchase of the horse. He was to have a half share in all profits, in addition to the interest on the ten-rupee loan.

Others were the keepers of the boundary gates that were to be found all over the Ballapura district. They too were keen in their master's interests, and apparently took deliberate pleasure in levying a fine upon every thoughtless native or European who should attempt to pass their boundary without being able to produce the little strip of Government paper proving that their taxes on bullock cart, jutka carriage, or bicycle had been duly paid up to date.

It was the evening of 28th September, and on 1st October all the Government taxes would have to be renewed.

Abu Taleb had spent a busy afternoon discussing with his chief agent the redistribution of the men appointed to sit at the receipt of custom in some twelve or fifteen different parts of the district. If their plans worked out satisfactorily, a nice little sum would be added to his credit balance, even after the takings had filtered through a good many pairs of skinny brown hands, the owners of which were every bit as covetous as the master under whom they worked for hire. Being covetous, they were also unscrupulous, and consequently hard-hearted in dealing with those whose daily work or sunset pleasure led them through the gates where receipted

rate papers must be produced, or the penalty in shape of a fine paid to the astute guardian of the boundary line.

Omar, the son of Esa Ashmed, had been born in a little hut near the railway crossing, that thousands of heathen worshippers had to pass over on their way to one of the richest temples in South India, dedicated to the worship of the wife of Shiva. Moreover, the cantonment lay beyond that crossing, and many military as well as civil European officials, driving in their carriages or riding out in the cool of the evening, made use of that special boundary gate.

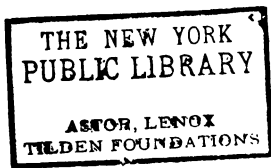
Omar had played around that gate in his babyhood; had graduated through all the rites and mysteries of Moslem boyhood in or near the same spot; had sometimes taken his father's place in the small shelter erected as a protection from the sun, wind, and monsoon rain.

There, too, he had learned to scan the passers-by, and to tell at a glance those who were licensed and those who were not.

Then, just as manhood's days had fully dawned for him, he had succeeded his father at the gate of receipt, and long years of service under oppressors a little above him in social rank had turned him into a white-haired and long-bearded bond-slave to extortion, with only one almost infinitesimal spot of softness in the organ that did duty for a heart; and, strange to say, that one tender spot was reserved for the long train of bright-eyed, cleanly-clad orphan children from the Mission Home. These children, with their stalwart protector, the driver of the



THE VULTURE'S GATE



mission bullock cart, passed and repassed Omar's hut every day on their way to school.

One day the baby of the school had caught her bare foot in a strip of bamboo, and had fallen across the lines of the rail close to where Omar stood ever watchful in his master's interests. Quickly he stretched forth a long arm, picked up the little one, and set her upon her feet before the cry that pursed up her little round mouth could escape her. From that day forward the schoolgirls, following the example of their bullock driver, always gave the old Mussulman a quiet "Salaam Iyer" both morning and evening; and somehow that daily salutation from innocent girlish lips had become a recognised part of the old extortioner's life, and had acted like the gentle rain from heaven upon the parched soil of his heart; so that one day, when the taxes had fallen due, and Paulappa had to use his bullock cart early in the morning to take his charges to school before he could get from the Municipality a renewal of his licence, Omar had so far forgotten his life's training as to allow the cart to pass unchallenged except for the usual friendly morning greeting. But Abu's spies were everywhere, and although Omar was quite an underling, his latitude to Paulappa on that occasion, when he might easily have extorted from him a four-anna fine, became known to those in authority over him, with the result that upon the next day on which the half-year's taxes fell due, he was amongst those agents selected for redistribution; and so it came to pass that on Sunday morning, October the 1st, ere the rising sun had dispelled the shades of night, he

resigned his beloved "lookout" into the care of a stranger.

Although the sun shone forth brightly, the early morning air had a suspicion of coolness in it, as Paulappa hitched in his bullock and gave the school children the signal to fall in line and prepare to march to the mission compound, where the first service of the day was being held. The girls drew their white muslin saris more closely around them, and set off at a brisk walk, instead of lagging behind to keep time with the steady, slow steps of the bullock, that no amount of urging on the part of Paulappa would cause to take more than half a dozen desperate lunges forward.

Out of the compound and round Durgamma's temple the white bullock, followed by the white-robed procession of schoolgirls, led the way quietly enough, reaching the "Vulture's Gate" without any interruption, when suddenly a halt was cried, as a tall, thin, sinewy Mussulman stepped from the shelter of Omar's hut and laid a detaining hand upon the scrap of rope that did duty for the bullock's rein.

"Where is your licence?" he demanded.

"Licence," repeated Paulappa, as though to gain time, "there is the number on the cart; that is my licence," and he clicked his tongue against his cheek, slapped the bullock, and attempted to pass on.

But the new gatekeeper was powerful, and without further parley he struck the patient dumb creature a stinging blow as it attempted to obey its master, thus bringing it to a standstill as he said, "That

licence ran out at twelve o'clock last night. Where is your new licence?"

Now the girls were out of their orderly ranks and crowding together in excitement at such an unheard-of thing as not being allowed to pass through the Vulture's Gate. Paulappa, always slow of comprehension, looked stupidly round, not taking in the drift of the Mussulman's information with regard to the expiration of the licence at midnight on the 30th of September, and one of the teachers had to come to his rescue.

"This is our holy Sabbath day; we are on the way to worship our God. Let us pass, and when the Municipal Office opens to-morrow morning, our Missyamma will procure the new licence that you demand," she explained.

"If you have not already got your licence, you cannot pass without a fine. Pay me four annas, and you can go on your way."

"But we cannot pay. We have no money. Are we cows to yield milk when the udder is dry?"

"Then you cannot pass this way," and Omar's *locum tenens* deliberately turned the bullock's head back in the direction from which it had just come.

This stirred up the phlegmatic Paulappa, for time was passing, and he was under strict orders to have his flock at church in good time; and so he began to explain the position to the man who wanted money, not words.

With many emphatic gestures he told how his mistress always paid her lawful taxes, how he had

passed through that gate for many years, and had never suffered such an indignity before as having his bullock turned back. He declared that Omar, the good, knew all about him, the cart, and the bullock he drove; he knew quite well the children who went that way to school so regularly, and the English lady to whom they, the cart, the bullock, and himself, belonged.

But the new tax-gatherer was obdurate. No pleading, no extenuating circumstances, no explanations, no promises for to-morrow were of any avail. He would not let that unoffending bullock, followed by the train of schoolgirls, pass through the Vulture's Gate until the magic coins, that meant gain to himself as well as to his master, lay snugly in his greedy palm.

There was no help for it. The Mussulman had the strength of arm and the force of might, and he held the gate against all unlicensed vehicles and animals, and Paulappa, not being in a position to pay the four annas demanded from him, turned sorrowfully back, to be met at the gate of the compound by Miss Thomson, the lady missionary, who, relying on the speed of her bicycle, had delayed her starting for the mission chapel.

The children were frightened at the turn of events. Some of them were sobbing, and all were more or less eager to explain why they were to be found with their faces turned homewards instead of being well on their way to the Pettah.

Paulappa was the least coherent of all, and so it took the lady a few minutes to comprehend the situation.

When she did so, she gave the order for all to return, and herself rode on ahead.

As she was about to cross the line of rails, the Mohammedan sentinel stepped forth and laid a detaining hand upon the handle-bar of her machine, thus obliging her to alight. When the man saw his purpose to stop her had succeeded, he raised his right hand to his forehead, saying, "Mem Sahib must not be angry with a poor slave for obeying his master—the Mem Sahib must show her licence for the rubber gādi¹ she rides," but the sinister look in his keen eyes belied the smooth words of his oily tongue.

Miss Thomson soon produced her licence, which she always carried in her tool bag; for many a time, in riding beyond the bounds of her own district, had she been pestered for her licence. Once when she was without it, and had no money with her, she had been obliged to leave a pair of gloves with the tax-gatherer as a token of good faith that her licence had been duly paid and the number of her carriage duly registered. So keen are these Mohammedan publicans in the discharge of what they have been trained to consider their duty.

But to-day the blue paper was of no avail, for it was 7 a.m. on Sunday, 1st October, and that same licence had expired seven hours earlier. True, the Municipal Office where the renewals were issued would not open for another twenty-four hours, but that was just where the gain came in for those who had purchased the right to sit at those receipts of

¹ Carriage.

custom and pounce like vultures on their unsuspecting prey.

In suave tones, the Mohammedan explained the situation to the lady, averring before God and His holy prophet that to allow her to ride over those rails without first paying a fine of four annas was to bring down the wrath of his master and take the rice out of the hands of the children Allah had graciously blessed him with.

But Miss Thomson firmly declined to part with four annas for any such reasons. The Municipality was closed ; she could not possibly renew her licence on Sunday, but as soon as Monday morning dawned, she promised that all her lawful taxes would be forthcoming. The four-anna fine she considered under the circumstances to be an unlawful extortion, and she would not pay it, no, not if fifty such publicans as the one before her demanded such an injustice.

This did not suit the Mohammedan, who was in that special spot to get all he could, and not to listen to explanations, promises, or comments. Moreover, by this time Paulappa had again arrived on the scene, and Ebrahim had to turn his attention to stopping any further progress on the part of the bullock and its driver, even before his reckoning with the English lady had come to a satisfactory issue.

Paulappa tried to dodge past the wary guardian of the gate, but he was not quick enough to avoid the man, who was now angry as well as determined, and again the bullock's head was seized and the animal was jerked round in an opposite direction,

while the children in the cart screamed out in fear, and those who were walking scattered in all directions.

Matters were getting serious, and Miss Thomson, thinking discretion the better part of valour, drew out her money-bag to pay the four annas demanded by the human spider before he would allow the cart and the children to pass on their way to the morning service.

Ebrahim's eyes glittered at the sight of the silver two-anna pieces, and so fixed were they on the money that for the moment he had forgotten there might possibly be others passing that way, when the sudden clatter of hoofs arrested his attention, and to his dismay, he beheld two English officers from the barracks approaching his vantage ground. He was afraid of missing that four annas he had worked so hard for, so he simply held up a warning hand, and the gentlemen, seeing the group of native children and the English lady with her overturned bicycle, stopped quite naturally to ask the cause of the trouble.

Ebrahim was first in the field, and still alert where gain was to be effected, asked a sight of the necessary licence for the horse that was being ridden; but for answer the lieutenant's whip was raised menacingly and then brought dangerously near the brown legs that were only protected by calico pants.

"You extortionate son of the prophet, how dare you molest women and children on their way, when you know the licences cannot be renewed until to-morrow morning? Extracting fines, are you! You

sneaking, greedy, ugly dog of Islam. I'll teach you to oppress and defraud. How dare you insult an English lady!" And again the whip swung round with an ugly swishing suggestion, as it cut through the air keeping time to the sahib's hurled-out words of indignation.

The gatekeeper slunk back out of reach of the Englishman's dangerous-looking riding-whip, and for once in his life Paulappa rose to the occasion, touched up his bullock, and passed over the disputed line, quickly followed by the children.

The officers raised their hats to the English lady, at the same time expressing their satisfaction at arriving on the spot just in time to render her some service.

Smiling her thanks, she mounted her bicycle and rode away, and Ebrahim was left alone to ponder over his defeated purpose, and to rage with mortification over the failure of his first half-hour's work on that tax-gathering Sunday morning.

CHAPTER XI
ZYNEBAI'S MASTER

“ They love to pray standing . . . in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men.”—MATT. vi. 5.

CHAPTER XI

ZYNEBAI'S MASTER

E BRAHIM MOHAMMED walked in the lower ranks of Mohammedan society, and so, although his soul aspired to the distinction of keeping his women folk secluded behind the purdah, like other extravagant notions of more enlightened men, his aspirations in that direction had to be laid aside ere they came to the birth; for the force of circumstances compelled him to bow to the inevitable, and to use his wife as his servant, out of doors as well as in the privacy of his so-called home.

It was not for the sake of the women alone—what were they in his estimation, more than the pariah dogs, simply beings created for his service and pleasure—that he would have liked to keep them from the male eye of the world in which he moved. Oh dear, no! It was simply that it would add to his own importance for other men never to know the form and feature of his womenkind or to hear the female name reserved for the special use of his own lips.

For many years Ebrahim had only indulged in one wife; but with the years she had grown old—strange perversity in a Mohammedan woman—and

in many respects she failed to continue to please the man who had raised her to the position of wife. The years had also left their finger-marks upon Ebrahim, the lordly one; but naturally he was not capable of judging his own appearance and temper with quite the same amount of clearness as he could bring to bear upon such an inferior article as a wife was reckoned in a Mohammedan harem.

One day, while in Madras, on his employer's interests intent, he had the opportunity of picking up at a low rate a fair little maid of tender years.

Abdul Karim was poor as far as this world's goods are concerned, and he possessed more daughters than he did rupees on the day Ebrahim Mohammed called to ask for the interest that was due to his master on the loan he had negotiated for Abdul.

Being in sore straits for the necessary rupees, and just having had to severely punish his third daughter Zynebai for disobedience and bad temper, he determined to pass her over as a great prize to Ebrahim, as payment of his debt.

At first Ebrahim refused point blank to accept the tempting offer of a tall, fair girl, who was black-eyed, plump, and obedient—yes, very obedient—instead of the twenty rupees he must account for to his master, averring by the prophet's beard that he had no use for such articles of barter. Then, in a wavering moment of weakness, a vision of his wife intruded itself. He saw her grown infirm and sullen-tempered with the years; thin with hard work and little food. Her ill-temper was the result of coming

too much under his despotic influence, but of course he did not take that into account.

Then, for a man of his astuteness, he actually idealised the child he had not seen, but had heard described with the partiality of her father, who wanted to get rid of her; and then he weighed in the balances of his mind the advantages of young, sprightly Zynebai, as against the disadvantages of Aysheabubee, who, with the burden of her forty years, was no longer to his taste. The scale went down in the favour of Zynebai, whom he determined to take unto himself as a second wife, if he could beat down Abdul, her father, to half the sum he had named as being what he was willing to part with her for. As to Zynebai's choice in the matter, of course there was no need to inquire. She must do as her father told her, and ask no questions.

Ebrahim Mohammed and Abdul Karim were both eaten up with greed, though they manifested the same avaricious qualities in different ways, and so for the greater part of a day they haggled with each other, one time suave and another time angry, over what was a fair equivalent in money, in order to obtain the entire possession of an innocent girl's body and soul.

Ebrahim offered ten rupees, but Abdul would only reduce the twenty he had first asked down to fifteen, and the more they talked the more desirable the possession of Zynebai became in the eyes of Ebrahim; so, just as the sun dipped westward, he concluded his bargain by agreeing to receive Zynebai, plus five rupees, and give Abdul a clear receipt for

his twenty-rupee bill. As he dipped his pen in the ink to sign the receipted bill, the call for prayer rang out, and both men instantly ceased their work, and just where they were, in the open bazaar, they obeyed the call, worshipping on bended knee, with all outward devotion, while their hearts were full of the unholy transaction they had just completed.

That same evening Zynebai had been put into a cart, the ends of which were carefully covered with a thick sheet to prevent curious eyes prying into the treasure it contained, and thus, like a captive bird, she had been carried to the home of Ebrahim Mohammed, where she became an object of jealousy and hatred to poor old Aysheabubee, whose rights she usurped. But Ebrahim did an evil thing, not allowable even in a devout follower of the prophet; for he took Zynebai, the pure little maid, called her a gosha wife, and gave her no lawful right to the name.

Abdul Karim read between the lines of Ebrahim's dealings, and did not comment on the fact that no mention of marriage for the child had passed between them. The two men, with uplifted hand, called upon Allah and the prophet to witness to the validity of their transaction, but that was all.

It was of more moment to the girl's father that every rupee of the fifteen that he received in exchange for the girl rang true pure silver, as it passed into his keeping, than that tall, black-eyed Zynebai should be passed over to an unscrupulous man, whose regard for womanhood was as low as his own.

Zynebai had been an inmate of Ebrahim's house-

hold for nearly two years, when one unlucky Sunday in September he was deputed by his master, Abu Taleb, to exchange toll-gates with Omar, the son of Esa Ashmed.

But on that special day, as an agent of Abu's, he was a distinct failure, right on from the moment when the mission bullock cart and the lady on her bicycle had passed him without paying the fine he had vainly endeavoured to extort. For a few discomfited moments he stood stupidly staring after the vanishing cart and the two English officers, who were quickly out of sight, leaving only a cloud of dust to cover their retreat. He swore with no uncertain Mohammedan sound that he would yet take vengeance on those who had checkmated him. Then he turned to enter his hut, and sought to hide his shame away from the sunshine; for there was at that moment certainly no human witness to his feelings of utter defeat. In turning, his red-slippered foot touched a pariah dog that was sneaking round his small shelter. The touch of the dog further roused the fury within him, and his passion gave vent to an angry kick, which caused the unoffending scrap of ugliness to whine piteously, as it received a blow instead of the expected food for which it was hungrily sniffing and snuffing.

The whine of distress further angered the irate gatekeeper, and without more ado he picked up a stone and hurled it with such good effect as to completely smash the dog's skull.

The miserable little brute whined again, then groaned an awful death-groan as it rolled over in

the red dust and died, a sacrifice to the Moham-medan's ill-temper, the fruit of being outwitted by the Englishmen in the game of profit and no loss, that he was seated at the Vulture's Gate for the sole purpose of playing. He cast a look of passionate triumph at the result of his cruelty to the animal lying a few feet off, and muttering, "May God and His holy prophet so slay all who oppose me this day, and the quicker the better," he settled his red fez cap a little more jauntily on his head, stroked down his long grizzled beard, and once again sought the shelter of his hut, there to keep his eyes restlessly roving up and down the long stretch of road on which he might reasonably expect the unlicensed vehicles and animals to appear.

But the day wore on, and when the time for his midday food came round not an anna the richer was he for all his hours of watching at the receipt of custom.

It was unfortunate that on that particular Sunday of extortion Ebrahim's wife should be laid low with fever, yet so it was, and there was no alternative but for Zynebai to carry him his midday food, which under the older woman's directions she had also prepared. But Ebrahim did not choose that the girl he had introduced as an extra into his home should be seen walking abroad; and for her to come to the Vulture's Gate carrying his pillau was just the little match needed to set the fire of his anger blazing with the rapidity of rotten bamboos.

Then again the sight of her made him think of his fruitless morning's work, and of the expense she

was to him in keeping her; and there and then he registered a mental vow to get rid of her and her baby-girl, which also belonged to him, but for whom he entertained no fatherly regard.

With face and figure closely veiled, and poising her chatty of food gracefully upon her head, the girl drew near, all unconscious of her master's evil frame of mind.

Just as her foot crossed the line of toll, a handsome carriage, gaily painted, drawn along by two beautiful horses, appeared in the distance, and Ebrahim, all alert, stepped briskly forward and held up a warning hand to stop the coachman; but a self-complacent voice, that he knew well, ordered the man forward, and Ebrahim stood, the very embodiment of servility as he salaamed, and bowed again and again to the wealthy owner of the carriage, who was none other than Abu Taleb himself, driving round to make a personal inspection of the various gates at which his emissaries were stationed.

Seeing his master in so much ease and luxury deepened the scowl on Ebrahim's face, and fanned his already blazing passion.

Meanwhile, Zynebai had entered the hut, and set out the savoury pillau. Her task finished, she seated herself at a distance to await her master's pleasure. As she waited, she prepared his pipe as an after-dinner luxury.

To Ebrahim, his hut was his palace, and therein he ruled as despot. No longer Abu's slave, he became Zynebai's master, and Zynebai's master in no enviable frame of mind; for as he approached her

she rose to her feet, and his salaam to her took the form of a well-aimed blow with his strong, sinewy hand, as he pushed her out of his way, saying—

“Get out of my sight, dog of a woman.”

Unlike the pariah dog, the human dog with an immortal soul, capable of loving, reasoning, and suffering, made no sound of complaint, but moved out of the way, and simply accepted her salute with the stoicism which was the fruit of her life of repression. Under Ebrahim's treatment the transition from a disobedient daughter to an abject slave had been a speedy one.

The gatekeeper sat down, crossed his legs, and without another word made a raid on the chicken and hard-boiled eggs that were cunningly hidden amongst the heap of rice, currants, and raisins that formed the bulk of his midday meal.

But he swore by the prophet's beard the chicken was tough as a buffalo's hide, and Zynebai, still trembling from the effects of her previous blow, shrank farther away, lest more chastisement awaited her. She knew she had bestowed much pains to keep the chicken tender while she extracted its delicate juices for the highly-spiced s̄aru that was to be eaten with the chicken and rice.

The fact was that the chicken was tender enough for any epicure, but evil passions make the teeth grind hard even against soft substances. Bad tempers also affect the palate, and when the temperature of the tongue rises, things that touch it are apt to appear cold in comparison. So Ebrahim's temper being on fire, it overpowered the heat of the condi-

ments in the s̄aru, and the s̄aru not being hot enough to make the tough chicken slip down as easily as eggs into a cobra's stomach, he picked up the chatty that held it, and without any further warning pitched its contents full into the unveiled face of the patient little woman who with much labour had compounded it, and then carried it through the noonday heat to pander to his love of appetite.

This time she screamed in terror. The smart from the blow had not gone off; that, added to the hot greasy mess right in her face, made her recoil, and utter shriek after shriek, as her eyes burnt with the agony caused by the chillies, salt, pepper, and other hot condiments in the s̄aru.

"You screaming hyena, stop all that shrieking and crying, or I'll silence you for ever, and send you to a worse abode than that of the prophet," bawled out Ebrahim in a white heat of fury, sorry now that he had wasted the s̄aru, that was really very good, only he did not know it.

"My eyes, my eyes," wailed out the frightened girl, vigorously rubbing in the irritating mixture, as in her ignorance she rubbed and rubbed, trying to relieve the awful burning sensation.

Then Ebrahim uttered an awful curse on the injured girl and her once bright, shining eyes, as he picked up her heavy outer-cloth, smothered her head with it, and forced her into the far corner of the hut.

She made a frantic struggle to free herself from the stifling folds of the cloth, but Ebrahim was too strong for her, and in the end his might triumphed

over her weakness, and he succeeded in reducing her to a little sobbing heap of passivity ere he picked up his hookah, and retired to the outside of his hut to smoke in the shadow of its walls. But even there the sound of Zynebai's smothered moans reached him, and the cry of "My eyes, my eyes," smote upon his ears that he could not make conveniently deaf.

Under the influence of the hookah his temper calmed down, and, all unmindful of the suffering girl within the hut, he dozed away the hottest hours of the day, quite sure that no one would be abroad at such a time.

When his unlucky day had almost run its course, and the greater ruler of the hours of light showed signs of declining power, heralding the approach of sunset, the passions within him had died down to the smouldering stage, gently fanned into jets of flame with every moan from the still-suffering Zynebai.

As the cool of the afternoon advanced, the temple of Durgamma became thronged with worshippers, who passed and repassed through the Vulture's Gate. They paid no heed to the praying Mohammedan, who, with the set of sun, hastened to spread his prayer-carpet in the public roadway, and with his face turned towards Mecca, his holy city, was going through the prescribed rules, regulations, and genuflexions of his religion.

Ebrahim Mohammed, the extortioner, the passionate, the cruel, to beast and woman alike, would have felt his soul burdened with a deadly sin if at the call to prayer he had omitted his public act of

worship. The Hindu women carrying their offerings to Durgamma knew the prayer actions off by heart, so accustomed were they to seeing the Mohammedans at their wayside devotions. They had one way of worshipping the deity, the Mohammedans had another. What did it matter, so long as they all attained their goal in the end.

And so they took no notice of Ebrahim, as with his hands hanging limply down, and his feet apart, he stood up in the first position of prayer. Then changing to the second, he raised his hands to the level of his ears, letting his thumbs touch the lobes of them; then slowly bringing his two hands together in front, with the right one uppermost, he bowed himself forward, spreading his hands upon his knees. Then he lifted himself up with the ease of long-practised movement, and again sank upon his knees; placing his hands outspread upon the ground, he lowered his head with seeming reverence, touching the earth with his nose and forehead. Still in the kneeling position, he lifted up his head, and sank slowly backwards, lowering his head twice or thrice. Then rising once more to his feet, which he kept in the position he had first assumed, he clasped his hands supplicatingly, and his evening prayer was ended. But only ended to be repeated, in the same never-varying fashion, five or six times. After the sixth repetition he stood erect, and held his hands in the form of an open book from which he appeared to be reading. The imaginary reading over, he gently stroked his face and beard, rolled up his prayer-carpet, and carried it into the hut, well satis-

fied with his own devotion to God and the prophet, and at the same time thoroughly indifferent to the suffering of little Zynebai, whose torment was entirely due to his wanton cruelty.

He had prayed. He had been seen of men and women in the very act of his entire devotion, and little he recked of what the all-seeing eye of God detected in the dark caverns of his inner being, given over to the possession of all manner of evil spirits.

Hundreds of miles away from where Ebrahim prayed in public, and Zynebai endured the tortures of her burnt eyes in private, Abdul Karim, her father, mounted the whitewashed roof of his village mosque, and stood, to be seen of men, high above the world below. He stood silhouetted against the evening blue of the sky, a supplicating figure, with outstretched hands and long garments gently flapping in the breeze, wailing out in tones of self-condemnation his nightly prayer. The only words the passers-by caught as the refrain to the poured-out prayer were "Allah, Allah, Allah."

His prayer concluded, he too stroked his beard of patriarchal greyness, descended from his elevated praying-ground, and went home very much at peace with himself.

Ah, Abdul Karim ! what about your once sprightly, flashing-eyed little Zynebai ? Do you ever give a thought to the welfare of the child whom you delivered over body and soul to be the prey of your fellow-devotee ? How much does it trouble you that, while you are letting all your village world hear you cry aloud, "Allah, Allah, Allah," she is crying for

relief from pain inflicted upon her by the cruel hands of the cruel monster you unlawfully named her master?

Ye make clean the outside of the cup and platter, but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness.

You have been seen of men, therefore reap the reward you merit; for as a man soweth, so shall he also reap.

CHAPTER XII
A WAYSIDE SHRINE

*“ They also built them . . . images and groves . . .
under every green tree.”—I KINGS xiv. 23.*

CHAPTER XII

A WAYSIDE SHRINE

A GROUP of some twenty black-skinned, unclothed coolie men and women sat, squatted, crouched, lay, or sprawled in every conceivable attitude of weariness outside the Mettypallium railway station.

They had walked, by slow marches it is true, from a village near Coimbatore to Mettypallium, the terminus of the railway line from Madras to the foot of the Neilgherry Hills.

It was the beginning of the hot season in Southern India, and while the fashionable English residents of that part of the world were hurrying away from the parching heat of the plains to the cool, refreshing breezes of the mountains, the unwashed Indian coolies were making their way to higher regions in the hope of finding, during the summer months, employment that would provide them with daily food. Shelter and clothing they did not take into account.

The train had crawled into the station a few minutes before the arrival of the coolie band, and a few white-faced, jaded-looking men and women had hurried into the cool shelter of the dining-room, to

obtain a refreshing whiff from the punkah, and to eat a doubtful breakfast of "grilled chops, eggs and bacon, chicken curry, sardines on toast, tea or coffee."

While they were swallowing their breakfast, the tongas arrived, to bear away at a breakneck pace the few who could afford to pay for the luxury of being whirled up the mountainside in a few hours, instead of loitering about until four o'clock in the afternoon, and then contenting themselves for many hours in a slowly-moving bullock cart.

But there was no breakfast, there were no tongas and no bullock carts awaiting the arrival of the coolies, who also rested a while before pursuing their toilsome journey up the steep Ghauts to the cooler regions, where the tea and coffee planters of the district might find them some work to do.

As they waited there, they were too tired to discuss the probabilities of the future; they were too hot even to jangle and quarrel one with another, as they often did merely for the sake of a pastime. But in eloquent silence a gaunt, half-starved-looking member of the company passed round his last scraps of betel, and an old woman produced from a mysterious fold of cloth around her wrinkled old waist a dirty rag that revealed itself as a receptacle for a few pinches of chunam: this she shared with her less fortunate companions, who took the smallest scrap imaginable, and, dry as it was, tossed it into their still drier mouths to help make the betel an even more savoury morsel. Not a word was spoken while the chewing went on. The only sound to

be heard was the peculiar smack of the lips as the chewers occasionally paused to emit from their mouths a dark red fluid not unlike drops of blood.

The morsel of betel and the pinch of chunam worked wonders amongst the tired group, for soon most of them yielded to its soothing effects on mind and body, and slept soundly in spite of their empty stomachs, the glare of the tropical sun, and the swarming mosquitoes that attacked the naked brown bodies with the vigour only excusable in hungry insects.

The man who had shared his last bit of betel with his weary, hungry companions stretched himself on the hard, hot ground, and closed his eyes without any idea of indulging in sleep. He wanted to shut out the sight of a leafless tree, with gaunt, spreading, arm-like branches, upon which sat an ugly demon-faced creature that continually cried, "Give, give, give. I am thirsty. Give me blood, blood, blood."

Lakshman, this beholder of frightful visions, was an ignorant coolie man. He had lived in one village all his life, and had been taught (and believed it too) that the many gods of his village were always on the alert to do him as well as the other villagers some mischief. So it was necessary for him to be careful as to his behaviour towards them, or he might some day find himself condemned by their sportive fancy to roam the world without a wife, a resting-place, or even a bodily form.

One day he had obtained some chance employment in the paddy fields. The man whose work it was to walk up and down the tip-pole at the well

was stricken down with fever, and Lakshman had stepped temporarily into his place; for the trenches must be flooded with water no matter who was ill or who was well.

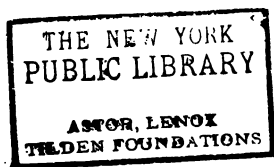
But Lakshman had been idle for a week, and no work meant scarcity of food in his humble dwelling. So when he began that wearisome march in the hot sun, up and down the pole that was over the well, a good hearty meal was what he needed to put him in form for his day's toil. But necessity knew no law in his case, and he must earn his daily grain and curry before he could eat it. When his task was accomplished the sun had set, the great heat of the day was over, but Lakshman's head ached, and his stomach was almost flat with his back.

At the edge of the paddy field there was a spreading leafless tree, and underneath the tree a tiny temple about the size of a carpenter's tool chest. Inside the temple stood a small figure of Durga, the bloodthirsty goddess. The night Lakshman passed by with his aching head and hungry stomach the village priest stood in front of that ugly idol, holding in his hand a bleeding bird that he had just slain at the request of a thin, trembling woman with large, piteous eyes.

She was the wife of the man whose work Lakshman had been doing that day. He knew her well, and it needed only a glance to tell him that she must be offering the blood of the bird to the figure under the tree to try and get the revengeful Durga to spare the life of her stricken master. The man had seen such worship and such petitioning



"UP AND DOWN THE POLE THAT WAS OVER THE WELL."



more times than he had lived days, and yet on that particular night the sight of the dead bird, the running blood, and the ugly goddess turned him sick, and without any knowledge of what was happening to him he fell to the ground a few feet from where the temple stood.

For many days and nights after that Lakshman lay tossing in a high fever, always haunted by the sight of the tree, the idol, and the blood. Now that he was better and able to work once more, the sights and sounds of his delirium pursued him still, and at times he felt he should go mad if he could not give that thirsty demon enough blood to drink.

All this had happened a year ago, and although he had made repeated offerings to Durga, the more he gave her, the more often the cry of "Give, give, give" rang in his ears. So one night, when he heard of the party that was starting out the next day for the Neilgherry tea plantations, he determined to form one of the number, in the wild hope of earning enough money to set up six shrines to the goddess Durgamma—shrines by the wayside, that should be visited by succeeding generations of coolies, travelling up the mountainside; shrines upon which the blood of birds should be continually spilt, so that in time the thirst of the goddess might be slaked, and he might lose the sight of that haunting vision which for a year had followed him relentlessly, filling his days with fearful forebodings and his nights with demoniacal terrors.

In the mild excitement of his journey from

Coimbatore to Mettappallam, the "vision" had persistently obtruded itself, and one afternoon, in desperation, he had persuaded his companions to club together to buy a tiny earthenware lamp, a few drops of oil, a cottonwick, and a handful of jessamine flowers. When they came to a tree which looked something like the one of his visions, he assured the party that a great monster dwelt therein, and they must appease him with an offering, unless they wanted him to slay them all in his wrath before they reached the foot of the hills. Being all children of superstition, they readily agreed to Lakshman's proposal; and so two heavy stones were placed under the tree, and on one of them the lamp was put, the flowers were laid on the other, and when darkness came on, the lamp was lit, and while its tiny flicker lasted the pilgrims hurried on to be out of reach of the demon, who was supposed to be smiling at the flowers and enjoying the light of the lamp.

Lakshman was well content. He had built one shrine, and some day, if ever he passed that way again, he might be rich enough to slay a fowl under that tree and pour out its blood an offering to Durgamma.

Four o'clock, and the bullock carts began to arrive at the station. There was luggage to be lifted in and arranged, and more helpers were urgently wanted.

There was a deafening cry of "coolie, coolie," at which Lakshman and some of his companions

rose, and pushed their way amongst the licensed railway porters, and seized parcels, hold-alls, umbrellas, and other luggage that seemed for the time being to be lost property.

There was plenty of confusion, vociferating, and shouting of orders here, there, and everywhere before all the English travellers were settled in the carts, their luggage piled up in front of them, the whips cracked, and the slowly-moving procession was started on its night journey.

Then Lakshman and his friends counted over their gains, and their thin dark faces glowed with satisfaction as they found they had twelve annas between them, not counting a bright silver two-anna piece secreted in Lakshman's dirty turban.

A lady had thrown this to the man as an extra enām,¹ because his fear-haunted eyes had looked so directly into hers, and a wave of pity for the man's apparently forlorn condition had surged through her tender heart.

Lakshman had no uneasy scruples about keeping this little silver coin apart from the others. He did not intend to use it for himself, but instead to spend it on that little demon who was always crying, "Give, give, give."

The bullock carts were off at last, and the party of coolies followed in their wake as far as the native village of Mettypallium. Here they spent their coolie hire in buying rāgi, onions, chillies, and salt. Soon the women were hard at work cooking the first good meal they had

¹ Present.

eaten since leaving their own village, more than a week ago.

While the women cooked, the men, as is their wont, waited, some patiently, others impatiently ; for the savoury smell of the onions and chillies increased their desire for the food so long denied them.

Lakshman, seeing his companions so well employed, conceived a sudden desire to be alone, and sauntered off in a careless, don't-care manner, apparently settling his turban aright, but in reality feeling after the safety of that precious two-anna piece.

On he went along the straggling, uneven streets, stopping every now and again at the different roadside bazaars to effect a purchase.

What a wonderful amount that two-anna piece bought, but what an amount of bargaining, haranguing, joking, and flattering on the part of both buyer and seller had to be gone through before Lakshman found himself the possessor of half a cocoanut, a lime, an earthen lamp with wick and oil complete, a pinch of red powder, a small string of jessamine flowers, and just one little copper coin, representing the twenty-fourth part of the bright silver two-anna piece he had set out with.

When he returned to the wayside encampment there were a few irregularities in his turban and his loin cloth had been rearranged, but none of his companions had been trained in the use of eyes and ears, and so Lakshman's recent purchases escaped comment. He squatted down with the rest, and made a hearty meal from the steaming rāgi, flavoured

with the luxurious chutney, compounded from the onions, chillies, and salt.

The coolies would have liked best to lie down and sleep off the effects of their unusually heavy meal, but already the bullock carts had left them far behind, and so the women gathered together their cooking-pots, tied the remainder of their feast into bundles, and they all set off again on the climb that appeared less toilsome now that the cravings of nature were satisfied. Indeed, they felt light-hearted enough to attempt a weird chanting song as they entered a dark tope at the very foot of the Ghaut. Or was it rather a pretence at cheerfulness when they were really feeling very frightened at the dark shadows cast by the trees—shadows which might be hiding some frightful demon, lurking behind a tree and ready at any moment to pounce upon them.

Steadily on they went, through the gloomy tope with its evil-smelling jack-fruit trees, until they emerged on the mountainside, thankful to be past the trees and their hidden mysteries.

Another two hours and their steady swinging pace brought them within sight of camp fires, and with a sigh of relief they drew near to the grateful warmth of the fires that the bullock drivers had kindled to cook their evening meal by. Already the chill of the mountain air was striking their almost naked bodies, and, now that their walk was ended for the present, they shivered with the cold as they crouched down to rest after their long and unusual climb.

Lakshman had kept pace with the others, all the time planning out in his slow fashion how to offer his cocoanut, lime, and flowers at the next shrine he should pass; but he wanted to do it without the others knowing of all his valuable possessions.

There was quite an important-looking shrine to Ganapati at the end of the last village they had passed through, and after that it had grown too dark to see any places in the tope where offerings had been made, and so he had reached the hillside encampment still carrying his votive offering in his turban and loin cloth.

Silence at last settled down on the night encampment, for all the persuasions of the English occupants of the bullock carts failed to make the drivers stir another yard until sleep aided their late supper in the process of digestion; the drivers and the coolies stretched themselves lazily down by the dying wood fires, and, while they dozed, Lakshman set out to seek a goodly tree under which to set up his shrine in order to propitiate the god that was haunting him with that tormenting vision.

He soon lost sight of the sleepers, but it did not seem dark, for the dancing, flashing fireflies led him on until he had gone a good half-mile, and then, right in his very pathway, the roots of a great tree almost tripped him up. Turning slightly to his right, he saw a fine large tree with outstretched leafy branches, and trickling near it a small streamlet. The very place for his purpose, he decided. A sacred tree and sacred water. What could be better? thought poor, tired, frightened, ignorant Lakshman;

and now, as if to aid him in his self-imposed task, with a sudden bound the moon leapt above the hill and shed such a brilliant light as to quite eclipse the meteor-like flashes of the modest little fire-flies.

Very deliberately Lakshman took off his turban, and from its folds extracted the half-cocoanut, the lime, and the lamp he had bought at Mettappallium. From his loin cloth he produced a small bottle of cocoanut oil, a wick, a dirty screw of paper, a string of faded flowers, and a few matches. These he laid solemnly down, and then stepped carefully into the cold water of the stream, and from its bed picked out seven uneven stones, which he carried and laid at the foot of the tree. Then he selected a flat stone rather larger than the others, and placed that to the right of the seven smaller stones. Upon this flat stone he set his lamp, which was only half filled with the oil he had bought, and soon the little wick floated in the thick grease with an inviting air of wanting to be alight. Next, the dirty screw of paper was untwisted and the reddish powder it contained was moistened with a drop of water from the stream, and with Lakshman's dirty fingers three bands of red were traced upon the trunk of the tree, and with the remains of the red mess the seven stones were daubed. Lakshman drew a breath of deepest satisfaction as his preparations for worship were almost complete.

With trembling fingers he lit the lamp, encircled the seven stones with the fading flowers, and then, with superstitious awe, laid the half-cocoanut and

the lime in front of the seven upturned stones at the base of the tree.

The shrine was made, the god erected, and the offering laid before it, and then Lakshman threw himself flat on the ground until even his forehead touched the bare earth, as in silence he worshipped the god he himself had set up.

As the man worshipped, an indescribable feeling of ecstasy swept through him, and he felt so thrilled with a new delight that he dare not move lest the beautiful sensation should pass away, and he should find himself once more the poor, weary, unclad coolie man, climbing the mountains in search of work that meant food for the coming days.

It seemed but a moment of time that that pleasurable emotion possessed him, for it passed away only too soon, and with a shiver he raised himself from the bare earth to see the lamp had burnt itself out, and the god he had created, and the offering he had laid before it, in deep darkness; for the moon, as though to shut out the sight of the ignorant worshipper and the senseless object of worship, had hidden her hitherto radiant face behind a passing cloud.

Strange to say, from the moment of his supreme act of adoration Lakshman saw no more the vision of the bare tree with its gibbering demon continually supplicating, "Give, give, give."

The next day Lakshman and his companions obtained employment on the first tea plantation they reached at Coonor, and when they returned to the plains at the end of the season, they were all so well

off as to be able to make (for them) quite a rich offering to the deities that had smiled upon their mountain-top efforts, and crowned their labours with such a large measure of success.

It was broad daylight when the same little company on their downward journey passed the place where Lakshman had turned aside to build his shrine to Durga, the wife of Shiva.

Before starting on his return journey, he had purchased a fine fowl in the Coonor Shandy,¹ and had carried it all the way down the hillside to kill it under the tree that he felt sure he should recognise as soon as he came to it.

Several others also were carrying sacrificial offerings, and so they would have quite a grand pooja on their homeward way ; for Lakshman had beguiled many an hour away at Coonor with his tales of the wonderful shrine he said he had discovered. He told them that Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, had herself appeared to him, to tell him that he and all that were of his company should have a time of prosperity on the tea plantation to which they were going.

All this had come to pass as Lakshman had said, and so the other coolies began to regard him with some amount of superstition.

The wonderful shrine was reached at last, but, to Lakshman's amazement, he found it enlarged and decorated, and a poojaree reposing near the entrance to the rude structure that had been erected over the now sacred stones that Lakshman's thin dirty hands

¹ Market.

had lifted five months ago out of the flowing stream.

The man was too astonished to say a word that would betray his previous knowledge of the place.

The earthen lamp had disappeared, and in its place there stood a bright one of brass filled to the brim with highly-refined cocoanut oil. There were signs of spilt blood all around, and many wreaths encircled the little slabs of stone, which were now gaudy with red and yellow paint.

The coolies hushed their voices to a reverential whisper as they handed their sacrificial birds to the poojaree, who with practised hand slew them and poured their life's blood upon the sacrificial stone, which showed signs of much use. The ignorant men and women worshipped and passed on, leaving the self-constituted poojaree all the richer for their visit.

How it had all come to pass Lakshman never knew, and the fat, ash-besmeared poojaree never meant to tell any tales of himself, or how, as a wanderer in search of employment, he had followed closely in the train of Lakshman and his party. Spying the newly-made shrine, he had conceived a cunning plan for enriching himself at the expense of all who in the days to come should pass that way.

He returned hastily to Mettypallium, purchased some priestly equipment, and speedily established himself in a hut which he erected near the shrine.

The very day he returned he found a few pies left by some unknown one in the earthenware lamp as an offering to buy a little oil to burn before the god.



A WAYSIDE SHRINE

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Day by day, as the coolies passed up and down, the self-installed, yellow-clad priest received their gifts for the gods, and appropriated them for his own use.

Thus, even in the five months that had elapsed since that little wayside shrine had been set up by the ignorant and superstitious villager from Coimbatore, the cunning one-time wanderer had left behind him a life of poverty and distress, and was now in a fair way to realise the luxury of living a life of religious ease at the expense of the deluded public, whose sole religion consisted in conforming to forms and ceremonies that to the vast majority were absolutely meaningless.



CHAPTER XIII

PEARL OF LIFE

“Two women shall be grinding together.” — LUKE
xvii. 35.

CHAPTER XIII

PEARL OF LIFE

J EVAMANI¹ and Gnanamani² her sister were both physically tired. The one was silent by reason of a multitude of thoughts that kept chasing each other through her brain; the other was cross because she declared her sister was too dull a companion at the grinding mill. All the working hours of the hot Indian day they had been kept busy grinding the grains that were needed by their father's large household in the preparation of all the extra food that was being cooked in readiness for the week of feasting and merrymaking that they, with all the world of Madras, observed for a week or ten days in the month of January when the cow was set up as an object of adoration and special affection.

When the girls had been roused, and bidden to roll away their mats, the myriad hosts of shining morning stars were paling before the rosy heralds of the rising sun. Ears attuned to celestial music might have heard them singing their pæan of praise to the Mighty Master Mind controlling their orbit through the boundless space of the universe.

¹ Gem of life.

² Gem of knowledge.

But the music of the spheres passed unnoticed by the two girls, who had a busy day before them. In the cool hours of the early morning their hearts were light as thistledown, and as they turned the mill round and round they sang snatches of song in praise of the animals they were preparing to do honour to.

But as the day dragged on, their task became burdensome, and the two large flat stones that formed their mill seemed far too heavy for their slight arms to turn round and round.

As their weariness increased, Jevamani relapsed into the silence that made Gnanamani bad-tempered, for she wanted to talk over the new clothes and jewels she expected to receive on New Year's Day. She had set her heart on a bright yellow cloth, with a deep red border. She had seen in Cunniah Shetti's shop the very one she wanted, and had described it most accurately to her mother. In fancy she had arrayed herself in it, had stroked every pleat into place, and drawn the silken end over her dark hair. She had seen the sparkle of her black eyes from beneath the becoming yellow, and she had even experienced the thrill of pride that she knew she would feel when the other women and girls would have to acknowledge that she was the beauty of the family.

Jevamani was not so buoyantly happy, for directly after the festival her marriage was to take place, and there were many reasons why she dreaded leaving home and friends, and being carried away to the far northern city where her future husband lived, whom



ROLLING CURRY STUFF



TWO WOMEN GRINDING

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she had never seen, whose name she did not know.

She was the elder of the two girls. Up to her tenth year she had gone regularly to a mission school, conducted specially for high-caste Hindu girls. There she had learned to read the Scriptures, but had left the school without giving her teacher any sign that the gospel seed had fallen upon fruitful ground.

Because her father considered it improper for a Hindu maiden to mingle freely with the outside world, he had bade the school conductress to call for his daughter no longer, as, according to the custom of his caste, he intended to keep her in the seclusion of her own home.

There she had spent a year, graduating in the idle gossip of the zenana, and being initiated into the duties that awaited her as a wife. She learned that her husband must be to her instead of God, and that as such she must render him all obedience and reverence. She must become such a part of him as to have no will of her own, or any desire for a separate existence.

Then one day, hiding behind a verandah pillar, as she tried to get a glimpse of the outside world, she had seen one of the school teachers pass by, and calling to her had said, "Oh teacher, I am forgetting all my lessons. I grind the curry stuff, eat my rice, and lie down to sleep, but I never see a book. Send the lady to see if my father will let her come to teach me."

That was all, for stern old Kruppamma, her

grandmother, called her in, and upbraided her sharply for talking to an outcast woman. She bade her quickly purify her body and her clothes, lest others in the house should become contaminated.

That happened nearly three years before the Pongal Festival that was to be followed by her marriage, and all through the three years a zenana teacher had visited the Naidu's family to give the girl two lessons every week.

Jevamani never knew quite what made her father consent to her having these lessons. The knowledge of what the daily instruction was tending to might have marred her happiness in thus being allowed to study. She certainly never connected her privileges with the fact that she was a betrothed wife, and that her future husband was a man of learning.

He had talked over with her father the fact that times were altering in India, and men were beginning to look out for wives who had some claim to being educated. He hinted more than plainly that if he found the child to whom he was bound did not come up to his expectations, in the matter of education, she would soon have to take second place to a wife of good attainments.

Now Narayana Swami Naidu had no wish for his eldest daughter to be deposed from her lawful wife-hood; although, if such an event happened, he was powerless to control it. Yet he felt he would give the girl a chance, and, as he was pondering over what form the chance should take, the lady missionary at whose school Jevamani had attended called

to see him with the request that she might be allowed to send a teacher to instruct her former pupil.

Narayana Swami Naidu took the tide at the flood, and agreed that his child should be taught reading, writing, sewing, and the contents of the Christian's sacred book.

Jevamani's desire for something more than household duties made her an apt pupil. Every moment she could spare from her water-carrying, her cooking, and her grinding she spent poring diligently over the few books she possessed. At the end of her first year's study she had made such progress that her teacher presented her with a Bible as a prize, telling her that it alone contained the only pearl of life that was worth any girl striving to obtain.

"Little Jevamani," she had said, in presenting her with the gift, "you have a beautiful name, and you will have a beautiful possession if, with the zeal of the diver, who seeks goodly pearls in the bed of the ocean, you search in this book and find for yourself the true gem of life, that will add lustrous beauty to the one who finds and keeps it."

"A beautiful jewel, a gem of value, a pearl of price," mused the girl day after day, as she turned over the leaves of the book that soon began to show signs of being well read.

"What book is that you read so diligently?" asked her father one day as he came unexpectedly into the women's verandah.

She rose hurriedly to her feet, and stood with downcast eyes, not answering a word, as became a well-bred Hindu daughter.

He did not repeat his question, but bade her pick up the book, that had fallen to the ground, and show it to him.

Obediently she placed the book in his hands, and then shook with an undefined fear of coming trouble, as the leaves of the book he opened fell back naturally at the place where it had been well conned over. It was the twentieth chapter of Exodus; and in the margin by the side of the third and fourth verses there was written in Telugu, "Jesus Christ is Jevamani's God."

Jevamani had found the Priceless Pearl, and finding it, had declared her right of ownership.

Her father was a high-caste man, always most punctilious in the discharge of his caste obligations. In his daily work, which caused him to associate freely with European officials, he was the courteous Hindu gentleman, making believe that he paid no attention either to caste or to custom; but at home caste assumed its own importance, and he paid due court to all its restrictions.

Like thousands of other educated men, he had read the Bible, but its truths had been without any force or beauty to him. But he knew right well what Jevamani's written confession meant; for in that moment he realised that the world of Madras would name his shrinking little daughter "Christian and outcast" if that same confession should ever come to ears of others than himself.

He was dumb with surprise at his discovery. The girl had more in her than he dreamed it possible for any female to possess. Why, she had even got the

intellect to think and decide for herself upon subjects that were too vast for his masculine ken ; and then, too, she had shown she had the courage of her opinions, and had even expressed them in writing.

It was hardly a moment by the clock that the father and daughter stood thus, but Jevamani's heart was throbbing ; the blood made her pulses tingle, it seemed to be rushing so madly through her body, and her legs were trembling almost too violently to keep her standing upright. To her surprise, her father merely shut the book, and addressing her in his usual tone of voice, said, " Jevamani, my daughter, the New Year is upon us ; when the rejoicings connected with the Pongal are over, your marriage ceremonies will be completed, and you will go to Allahabad, the home of your future husband." Without another word he left the women's court, entered his office, and wrote a note to the zenana teacher announcing his daughter's forthcoming marriage, and notifying her that her services would be required no longer. Yet another duty he discharged, and that was to command Jevamani's mother to keep her daughter well employed all through the preparations for Pongal. Thus, in dismissing the teacher, in providing menial occupation for the girl, and in hastening on her marriage, he assured himself that her unwomanly action in deciding for herself who or what should be her god was nullified, and she would soon forget her Christian teaching and her Christian tendencies.

That night Jevamani, girl as she was, tossed on her mat in a fever of anxiety and distress. The near approach of her marriage had opened her eyes

to the fact that with the discovery of the "Pearl of Life" a change had come into her heart and life. She knew that the gods worshipped in her father's household were far removed from the pure, holy incarnation of God, whom in her heart she named "Jesus Swami."

Outwardly a Hindu girl, but with a heart open to the beauty of the gospel, she had lived on in that Hindu home, learning, yes, and realising fully, all that marriage must mean for her with this unknown Hindu man.

In spite of her youth, she knew that the men of her community were possessed for the most part with the vile, unconquered passions that they themselves ascribed to the gods, which were the creation of their own minds and the work of their own hands. With such knowledge, was it any wonder that all through the long hours of the dark night an unutterable loathing possessed her girlish soul at the thought of becoming the bride of a man who would regard her body and her soul as things inferior to the animal that provided his daily milk.

No matter how she tried to sleep, her eyes would stare out into the darkness of the night. She longed to move about, but there were too many sleeping forms all around her, and she dare not run the risk of disturbing any of the sleepers.

"Jesus Christ is my God," she whispered to herself. "I will have one God only, and He shall be Jesus Christ. How can I reverence my husband as God? He will beat me, I know he will, but Jesus loves me. Oh, if I only knew how to get

away from here and be with those who know more of Jesus, I would go, yes, I would go, and so escape this hateful marriage!"

She did not pray for sleep, nor for deliverance; for she knew not how to pray for such blessings. But towards early morning the angel of kindly sleep drew near, soothed her fevered brain and hushed her into forgetfulness of what the dread future might hold in store for a Hindu girl who had secretly accepted Christ as her Messiah, and, according to the rules of her caste, must revere her husband as lord, master, and deity combined.

For the next few days the forthcoming Pongal was the absorbing topic of conversation amongst the women of Narayana Swami Naidu's household. With all the extra work and thought that it entailed, they gave but little attention to the fact that a wedding loomed ahead. Time enough to think of that when the Pongal was over. Now and again a stray remark was passed in the intervals of cooking, so that, however much Jevamani strove to forget, she would be called rudely back to remembrance and frightened anticipation.

It was thus upon the evening preceding the first day of the Pongal festivities that, while happy, thoughtless Gnanamani was filled with pleasure in anticipation of new garments and jewels, and her arm flagged in the monotonous "turn, turn" of the mill-stone, Jevamani grew more and more silent, putting extra power into the turning of the mill to make up for her sister's want of speed, and keeping time as it were with the rapidity of her thoughts.

She had already planned to let the lady at the mission school know she was to be married and taken away from Madras, but how to get the news to her was the difficulty, and after that what would come to pass she knew not. Her great hope lay in the fact of letting the missionary know.

"What next? what next?" was the question whirling round in her brain; and "what next" the wooden peg of the mill-stone seemed to echo back with every revolution, until in her energy she jerked the peg out of place, and sent the stones flying round by mere force of motion.

Gnanamani chided her sister for her carelessness, and pouted with anger as she declared her hand and arm ached, and she would do no more grinding for that night.

"But our task is not complete, oh Gnani. We have still several handfuls of rice to be ground into fine flour for the sweet cakes."

"Then you can do it."

"How can I grind alone? Whoever heard of one girl at the grinding mill?"

"I will not touch the mill again. Here comes mother with the new saris," and she walked away, leaving Jevamani, a solitary figure, still seated by the mill.

The expectant bride did not attempt to rise. She had no pleasure in new clothes for the Pongal while the uncertainty of her future pressed so heavily upon her.

There were quite twenty women of various ages gathered in the courtyard, and all were talking

excitedly about their new garments, their jewels, and the rich cooking that was almost completed for the morrow's festivities.

They told each other of the gay appearance of the cows with their painted or gilded horns; of the tinkling little bells attached to the horns or fastened round the neck; and they declared the flower bazaars were quite sold out, for the owners of the sacred animals had bought up the flowers in unusually large quantities to make handsome garlands to decorate the milch kine for the procession round the city.

Jevamani did not stay to listen, for she realised an opportunity to be alone had come to her, and so she too left the mill, and silently glided into a little room her father used as an office. With eager haste she seized pencil and paper, but with her heavy day's work, and the fear of discovery, her fingers trembled almost too much to write what she wanted. The words of the message being quite clear in her brain, she did just manage to transcribe them on the margin torn from an old newspaper.

"Jevamani worships Jesus, the Son of the Living God; but her marriage is fixed for February."

Only a short message, in cipher as it were, but oh, how pregnant with meaning to those who had the key!

Quickly she screwed up the scrap of paper, and tucked it under her plait of hair, and then, as silently as she left it, she crept back to her mill-wheel, to find the women still deep in their bazaar gossip, and a young widow stooping down near the mill to gather

up the rice she and Gnanamani had ground for the sweet cakes.

"Is that you, oh Saraswati?" asked Jevamani, trying to hide her confusion that she was afraid might be noticed by the women. "Sit down, and help me finish this rice. Gnanamani has run off and left me alone. How can I grind alone? There are only three more handfuls to do."

Saraswati and Jevamani were friends; for the more favoured girl had shown many a kindness to the delicate little widow, who in return had laid a dog-like love at the feet of the only one who had sought to make her heavy lot a little the lighter. So, though weary with her own labours, she obeyed the girl's call and sat down in front of her.

Jevamani's hand rested upon Saraswati's as they both grasped the peg of the mill, and as their hands touched the girls looked into each other's eyes, and with the look an electric wave of sympathy flashed between them; for Saraswati's eyes had grown big with pondering over her widow's lot, and Jevamani's were luminous and haunted with a trouble of another sort.

Jevamani turned the mill energetically, producing a whizzing, grating sound, under cover of which she spoke in low tones.

"Oh Saraswati, tell me, will you carry a message for me to the ladies of the mission school that you and I went to when we were tiny girls? Listen! no one must know about it. Only you and I and the ladies must be in the secret."

Saraswati comprehended at once that Jevamani

was on secret business intent, and so, without speaking, she twisted her head as an affirmative and held out her disengaged hand, while with the other one she kept up the "whizz, whizz" of the wheel.

Jevamani looked this way and that to see she was not being observed, and then from her hair she drew the screw of newspaper and passed it furtively to her companion, who at that moment broke out into a low, weird chant of song, to show her seeming indifference to any might-be onlookers.

Very cunningly she concealed the precious piece of paper in her scanty robe of faded red, while Jevamani took up the refrain of her song. Without another word the two girls finished their task at the mill, and none too soon, for the arrogant tones of the grandmother of the family, who had not the misfortune to be a widow, calling loudly for Saraswati, made her leave Jevamani to sweep up every particle of the rice flour from the mill.

"Saraswati! Saraswati! you lazy incarnation of evil, come here. Quick, quick," she ordered. "Gnanamani will not have this green sari with a gold border. Go in haste to the Flag Bazaar, find Cuniah Shetti's shop, and change this for the yellow one with the red silk border. Go and come without loitering."

It was growing dark, and many men and boys were already gathering in the streets, letting off squibs and crackers preparatory to the next day's festivities.

Saraswati was only eighteen, but she walked as one of the regiment of India's shaven heads, and

her reputation as a female abroad alone even after sunset was a matter of concern to none.

For once, she was glad to be out alone, and she experienced a thrill of pleasure at the thought of helping little Jevamani to lose that troubled look from her hitherto beautiful eyes; for she felt sure the message she was intrusted with was the outcome of a secret sorrow Jevamani had not shared with her.

"I'll go to the missionary's house first," she decided. "I shall be late back with the sari, and the cross old grandmother is sure to beat me, even though I tell her the bazaar man would not attend to me. If I could get her bamboo stick, I'd put it under the rice pot and burn it to ashes, as I wish they had burnt me when my master died," and with the thought the girl put her hand up to her face to feel once again the mark left there that very morning by the too sharp application of the bamboo cane.

Her thirst for vengeance seemed to shorten the distance as she followed the winding way of the narrow streets and reached the mission-school premises, only to find the back entrance shut and securely locked.

Well, there was no help for it, she must go round to the front, and she remembered with a shiver of fear the dog that used to be tied up in bygone days. Besides, it would take her ten minutes longer to walk to the front of the bungalow, and she felt in imagination a few extra blows from the bamboo cane, and she saw, too, Jevamani's eyes like stars of

entreaty, urging her to fulfil her unspoken promise. So she set her teeth in defiance of her dead husband's paternal grandmother, and sped a little faster round the corner leading to the compound where the missionary's house was situated.

It was now quite dark, and the twinkling stars seemed very far away, but Saraswati walked bravely on till the bark of the dreaded dog smote upon her strained ear, and she paused to find out from which direction the sound came.

To her relief, she could see a light shining through the trees, and thus encouraged, she took a few more steps forward, and in another minute she was out of the deep shadows and into the warm glow cast by a lamp burning on the verandah of the mission-house. Beyond the lamp, she saw into a bright, pretty room, where two ladies sat, the one reading a book, and the other sewing.

An inviting cough from Saraswati caused both the ladies to look up, and a second louder intimation that a visitor had arrived caused one of them to walk out on the verandah.

In response to her question, "Who is there?" Saraswati emerged from the friendly protection of the verandah pillar, folded her hands in front of her face in respectful salaam, and taking out the crumpled newspaper note, laid it on the ground, and then retired a few steps, while the lady picked it up and read the message it contained.

"Jevamani worships Jesus, the Son of the Living God; but her marriage is fixed for February."

She read it three times before she could speak to

the bearer of it, and in reading it her heart overflowed at the beauty of the confession, and sorrow at the underlying entreaty contained in the last sentence; for she realised how powerless she was of herself to help the Hindu girl in her dilemma. Well she understood that she meant to ask for a way of deliverance from her marriage with this Hindu man. Her heart prompted her to effect her rescue at any cost, but in doing so she laid herself open to the arms of the Indian law, which recognised a girl's father as her guardian in things spiritual as well as temporal until her sixteenth year, and after that her husband assumed the position of owner and protector.

Jevamani was fourteen, and was passing immediately from her father's house to that of her husband—handed over as a piece of lawful property from the one man to the other. A human slave without a will of her own in this matter of disposal, but withal a woman of sensitive feeling and pulsating desires, like an imprisoned songstress of the woods beating its wings against the bars of its cage in vain endeavour to free itself from a hateful life.

It took but a minute for Miss Malcolm to fully grasp Jevamani's straitened case. She wanted time to think it out, but meanwhile Saraswati stood waiting, and she must send some reply by her to Jevamani.

"Who sent you with this note?" she asked the girl, whom she saw branded with India's cruel marks of widowhood.

"Who sent me? She who wrote it."

"Do you know what the letter is about?"

"How should I know? There is no power with me to read."

"Do you know the one who wrote it?"

"Know her? Yes, we live in one house. She shows me much kindness when the others abuse and torment me."

"She shows you love, you say. Could you help her to come and see me one day during the Pongal Festival? She was a pupil in the school, and I should like to see her, and talk of that about which she writes."

"Alas! no. The little sister is now fully grown, and about to be married. Her caste rules do not allow her to walk abroad. After her marriage more freedom will be permitted to her."

"Then will you carry to her a message from me?"

"I will carry it, lady." Then she added a little further information, as though she had pondered what she should say: "Jevamani's eyes grow dull with fear as a woman's when she finds herself a widow having no sons." And there was the sound of a sob in the girl's voice.

"Dear child, you too are unhappy; let me help you. I love you because God the Father loves you, and I love Jevamani, my own little sister in the faith," said the lady, almost under her breath, as she remembered again the Hindu girl's confession.

"You cannot help me, oh lady! It is my lot to be miserable. I must go. The little one awaits my coming."

"Yes, it grows late, you must go. Tell her whom you call little sister that I am her friend. I understand and am ready. But you at least are free to come and go at your pleasure. Come again and tell me the news concerning Jevamani. I shall watch for your coming."

The widowed girl disappeared into the darkness of the night, and the lady turned again into the bright lamplight, to talk over with her colleague ways and means of helping Jevamani.

Saraswati sped away through the compound towards the Naidu quarter of the city that she called home, when she suddenly remembered the sari she was sent to exchange in the bazaar. Where was it? What had become of it? She must have dropped it, but where, when, or how she knew not. Perhaps it was at the back gate of the mission house when she had felt about in the darkness for the way to get into the compound.

The thought sent her hurrying back, but no sari could she find, and no sari did she find although she retraced every step of the way from her home to the mission house. Two fears fought for victory in her heart. She dreaded to face her grandmother's anger, and she feared greatly to wander about the streets all night. Finally she crept home, and without detection lay down on the bare floor that was her accustomed sleeping-place.

But the morning light that ushered in the first day of the Pongal brought punishment and sorrow on the head of faithful Saraswati.

There was no appeasing Gnanamani's bad temper

when her yellow and red sari was not forthcoming, and old Kruppamma's wrath knew no bounds. She beat the girl unmercifully, and then caused her to be tied to the rafters of a "go-down" suspended by her thumbs.

The day wore on, and the older women with the children feasted, and from the roof of the house viewed the garlanded cows with their tinkling bells being led along in endless procession.

Jevamani, as a betrothed maiden, was not allowed to appear in so public a place as the house-top, but had to be content with the court below; and so it happened that in the quietness of the deserted courtyard she heard the moans of Saraswati, now unconscious with the torture of her punishment. She listened, till she found out from what direction the sound came, and then, her heart beating with fear as to what she should find as the cause of the noise, she entered the go-down, to see poor Saraswati's face drawn close up to the roof.

"Alas! alas! oh Saraswati," she cried aloud, "what has happened? Who tied you up there?"

But the girl made no coherent answer. She only babbled on of the mission-house, the English ladies, the lost sari, and of Jevamani's sorrow that she thought was akin to her own.

Jevamani could see no way of helping the suffering girl. She could not reach her hands to untie the cruel cords that bound her, and the room was empty of anything that could be placed under the feet of the hanging girl. Then an inspiration seized Jevamani, and she rushed off to the cook-room, picked

up the flat stone that formed one-half of the grinding mill, and laboriously rolled it along to the go-down, and placed it under Saraswati's feet. But it proved an inch too short to touch the feet suspended above it.

Should she try and roll the other stone? But no, she could not lift the one on top of the other, even if she succeeded in rolling it from the kitchen. She looked up at Saraswati's agonised face, and then down at the stone she had placed beneath her, not knowing what else to do. Twisting and cracking her fingers in her indecision, an idea flashed through her brain, and she exclaimed, "The Veda, I'll bring my true Veda."

In a second almost, she had gone and returned with her Bible, and placing that on the top of the mill-stone, she made a resting-place for Saraswati's dusty feet. Then she fled for fear of discovery, not giving a thought to her identification through the book she had left behind her.

All through the day Saraswati hung there, and no one knew just when her earthly sorrows ended, for when the grandmother decreed she should be untied from the rafters, it was only her poor beaten body that was lifted down. The horror of finding a dead body within the house did away with all questioning as to the one who had placed the stone and the Bible beneath the dead girl's feet. Neither were any questions asked as to the fate of Saraswati. In the course of an hour or two, the neighbours knew that the young widowed relative of Narayana Swami Naidu had succumbed to an attack of fever.

A most unfortunate occurrence for the family, right in the midst of the Pongal celebrations. Within a few hours her body was burnt with the scant ceremonies pertaining to the disposal of the body of a Naidu widow.

Some weeks passed, the Pongal was over and February nearly ended, but no further message had reached Miss Malcolm from Jevamani.

The young widow had made no sign whatever, and the lady could only surmise that she had not been faithful to her trust, or, being faithful, had failed in any endeavour to communicate with her again. The zenana teacher haunted the street in which Jevamani lived in the hope of catching a glimpse of the girl, or of getting a message of cheer sent in to her. But it was all to no purpose.

She knew the wedding was in course of celebration from the outward signs of the marriage festivities.

Then there came a day when the gay pandal of white and gold and silver was taken down from the house, proving that the wedding was over, and the bride had been taken away to her new home.

Seromani, the teacher, could get no replies to her questions concerning Jevamani, for the people in the street preserved a silence she could not understand.

Both she and the missionary began to think they had heard the last of their one-time pupil, for whom they nevertheless continued to pray and watch.

The wheel of time turns swiftly and surely, and the to-morrows of three full years became the yesterdays of the past, before one little corner of the veil of secrecy that hid Jevamani from the outer world

was drawn aside, showing the girl grown tall and thin in the three years of her wifehood.

A white-haired lady in the city of Allahabad found her one day in the course of her visits to the zenanas of that city. She had long sought to obtain an entrance into the home of a certain English-speaking man of good social position, but had failed until one day a tall, fair girl, seeing her come out of the next house, had made salaam to her, and asked her if she went round reading the Christian's Holy Book.

"Yes," said the lady, "and I will come and read to you with pleasure if I may."

From that day she went regularly, and it did not take her long to find out that the girl who had invited her to come in had a history behind her. To the missionary, she looked like one who had fought in a battle, and believed herself defeated. She was constrained and nervous, and would not speak freely before the other women, who crowded round to hear and see all they could of the foreign lady who had penetrated the seclusion of their zenana.

The pathetic patience in her eyes made the lady think of her as a little human flower of sweet fragrance transplanted into uncongenial soil and withering away for want of sunshine and fostering care. To her only the name and duties of wife were accorded, while the adulation and honours of the position were laid at the feet of another.

In the end love conquered the girlish wife's reserve, and one day, when an opportunity for quiet

talk came, she told her new-found friend that she was Jevamani, eldest daughter of one Narayana Swami Naidu of Madras; that in a mission school there she had learned to read the Bible, and afterwards, through the help of a zenana teacher, had sought and found Jesus as her Saviour. Her patient eyes became luminous with emotion as, nervously playing with her bangles, she said, "Please write to the lady, Miss Malcolm, in Madras, and tell her that when I light the evening lamp, I fold my hands and say in my heart only, 'Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name. Thy kingdom come.'"

That is all there is to tell now. Again the curtain has dropped over Jevamani, her life, her home, and her aspirations after a true and holy God.

Thanks be unto the All-powerful One that His eye can penetrate the thickest purdah, and that He calls every one of these secret disciples by name.



CHAPTER XIV
SHIVALINGA'S GIFT

“ The woman said unto him, Sir, Thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. . . . Art Thou greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank thereof himself? ”—JOHN iv. 11, 12.

CHAPTER XIV

SHIVALINGA'S GIFT

HE was grizzled, and grey, and bent; not with the weight of many years, for he was yet far removed from the allotted limit to the term of man's natural life. But his physical infirmities were the result of the austerities of the life he had led as a religious mendicant, begging his way through the entire length of India's enchanted land; stopping for a season at every so-called hallowed spot; doing pooja at shrines so numerous that he could not reckon them for number, and leaving on the altar of every one a substantial offering to the deity it represented. How long it took him to walk the weary miles from Cape Comorin, his starting-point, to the source of the revered Mother Ganga,¹ the emaciated, weather-beaten, scantily-clad, ash-be-smeared devotee of three hundred millions of dumb, senseless gods could not have told. But he knew that when the journey was commenced his step was firm, his bearing sprightly, and the yellow cloth—sign of his religious fervour—could not hide the well-nourished condition of his body, and no threads of silver gleamed amongst his glossy black hair.

¹ River Ganges.

When he first beheld the gushing, babbling stream that was to broaden out into the heaving bosom of the mighty Ganges, the trials of the way were forgotten, and he felt almost as young as when he started forth with staff and chumbu¹ in hand.

His sunken eyes glowed like living coals, until, in his transport of joy, he lowered the wrinkled lids over the burning balls to shut out for a brief moment the sight that was almost too overpowering for his weakened physical powers; for Shivalinga was no professional mendicant from necessity. He had made his pilgrimage from high and holy desires.

Sincere religious fervour thrilled through his whole being, until the intensity of his purpose, to be free from the sum of his accumulated sins, nullified every base or earth-born wish. He fasted; he hungered; he walked and he toiled; ever onward, onward; always struggling towards the goal of every pilgrim's heart; and when at last that goal was reached, he was no longer young in experience, although but few years had run their course since he set out from his native village.

He rested a few days, and then once more set himself the task of tramping on, on, on; for the sight of the cool, gurgling stream had not had the mysterious power of soothing his restlessness of purpose.

Even when he washed in its cold waters, the only result was the disappearance of much of the filth he had gathered on his body. His long, matted hair was much more troublesome after it had been once wet, for now it hung round his head like a filthy mat

¹ Drinking vessel.

of cocoanut fibre, because the water had caused the hitherto muddy coils to cake together.

The water of the Ganges had made him a little cleaner outwardly, but inwardly he was assuredly the same man, craving, always craving, for some satisfaction that yet was not his. Another seven years, and his second task was accomplished. He had walked down the right bank of the river to where the sacred waters became lost in the mighty ocean, and back again along the left bank to the spot he had started from.

The seven years of toilsome journeying had not dealt lightly with the seeker after oblivion, but had left him a dirtier and more repulsive-looking object than when first he rested his tired eyes on the sacred waters of Mother Ganga.

But Shivalinga cared nothing for his outward appearance; at all costs he desired to store up merit that should be a powerful factor in causing the number of births through which he must pass to appreciably diminish.

Again he rested a few days, and while he lay without shelter, under the rays of the burning sun, the thought of traversing the banks of the Godavari began revolving in his mind.

The slow marching along the banks of a winding river had become so habitual to him, that he missed the daily occupation, and a feverish restlessness possessed him to be once more on the move. But his strength was almost gone, and there was a long stretch of country to be first covered between the source of the Ganges and that of the Godavari.

The old man's spirit was willing, but his flesh

failed him, and the hot season found him far from his beloved Ganges, and farther still from the now greatly-longed-for Godavari; but he wandered on, until, faint with hunger and almost dying from thirst, he reached the mud walls of a village nestling beneath a great rock, that sentinel-like rose from the flat, barren waste of the surrounding country.

He threw down his kambli¹ and chumbu, and then lay beside them in the first little shadow cast by the village huts, and there Owakka, wife of the village goldsmith, found him, when she was returning from the only well the village possessed, carrying her evening's supply of water.

For days and weeks and months the "holy man" lay in the torpor of exhaustion, but he always seemed to know all that went on in the home of the goldsmith. He knew how carefully Owakka tended him, and however short the rest of the members of the household went, his chumbu was always kept filled to the brim with the clearest water the village well could produce.

As he lay on the most luxurious mat the goldsmith's wife could find him, and listened to the chatter of the women as they came and went about their cooking and their water-carrying, he resolved on one more stupendous act of devotion to his gods, as a final effort to the many he had already made for the accumulation of that merit which was to win him his heaven.

He would dig a well for these simple, kind-hearted village folk. He would dig a deep well that should be a perpetual source of cold, sweet, sparkling water.

¹ Blanket.

The thought gave the old man strength, and he spent no more idle days lying on the pial of the goldsmith's house, but at once set about procuring the land for the well that he was now persuaded was to be the final cause of his salvation.

Soon that quiet, sleepy village beneath the rock in the desert became a scene of activity, for men, women, and children thronged in from villages far and near, to dig the famous well, and to hear the holy man's recitations from the Puranas, and the mantrams that were unceasingly upon his lips.

Down, down into the dark earth the diggers picked their way, through a stratum of rock and then below a bed of shingle, but there was no sign of the pure, dancing, sweet liquid, that the "holy man" declared they would come to if they persevered in their task. Of course, they did persevere; for as long as their coolie hire was forthcoming at the end of each day, it was a matter of indifference to the workers whether they ever came to the water or not.

But Shivalinga was far from being indifferent over the well of water that meant so much with regard to his eternal welfare.

It was the light half of the month of September, and, according to the old man's calculations, the water in the well he had caused to be dug should soon be gushing forth. The soft moonlight tempted him forth after all the village was asleep, and by its aid he found his way to the pile of débris surrounding the huge excavation that was to give water to the villagers for all future time.

By the help of his pilgrim's staff, he descended

the rude steps that had been cut down the side of the well, and as he went he counted them one by one until he reached one hundred and twenty, and then, in sheer amazement, he stopped, for at that moment something—down, down, still many feet below where he stood—caught a gleam from the moon overhead, flashed back into the curious eager face above it, and with an elusive little trickle and gurgle seemed to murmur a sweet defiance to the agitated face bending so tremulously forward to make quite sure that he was, in reality, looking upon the water that he had longed for, and prayed might burst through that hard rocky ledge so many feet below the surface.

Again came the silvery gleam, and this time Shivalinga was sure the water was bubbling up, and that the reflection below was no moonlight fancy on his part.

With unsteady fingers he loosened his waist cord and fastened it round the neck of his chumbu, to see if he could draw up some of the precious sparkling water.

He let the little brass vessel down, but the cord was too short to allow its touching the water, and so off came the old man's rag of a loin cloth, and that tied on to the cord just succeeded in being the desired length, from where he lay extended on the hundred and twentieth step below the surface, to reach the water that was now bursting into the well with a joyous sound, singing of plenty for to-day and all the days to come.

With a long-drawn sigh of satisfaction Shivalinga filled his chumbu, drew it up to his perilous resting-place, and raised the precious draught to his lips,

parched and feverish with the intensity of his emotion.

Long and slowly he drank, drank with the keenest of satisfaction, for the well was deep, and the water was sweet with just the most delightful suggestion of the earth from which it had issued in new-born joy; and as he drained the last dregs from the chumbu, the water-drinker's soul was filled to overflowing with a new feeling that he had never before experienced.

What was this new delight, surging and tumbling through his withered old heart, making his pulses tingle and his whole being throb as though keeping time with the gurgling, merry movement of the in-rushing water so far below his feet?

In thought, he saw once more the spot where the Ganges issued from the place of its release, and he saw it merge into a mighty river, and then become part of the vast ocean; but he had had no part nor lot in the creation of those great waters. How different this deep, cool well; this child of his brain; this outcome of the free expenditure of his hitherto carefully-hoarded rupees.

Ah! this indeed was joy; this was delight; this was a foretaste of heaven. How he had longed and striven to die on the banks of the sacred river just within sight of sacred Kasi (Benares); but now, to die by the side of his own gift to the beloved village people who had received him and cared for him in his hour of need, was all he craved.

But Shivalinga, the "holy man," "the great Yogi," did not die. He lived to see the well finished, and thoroughly appreciated by hundreds of the villagers,

who for the inestimable blessing bestowed upon them revered him more and more as the years went by, proving his promises true that the supply of sweet, sparkling water would never fail, even in the hottest and driest season.

In time, the path to the well became a hard-beaten track through the constant coming and going of the women's untiring feet.

The goldsmith had retired from business, and Owakka, his wife, was a great-grandmother who knew how to rule her household of daughters, daughters-in-law, and female grandchildren, when one day there was a new and startling excitement in the narrow streets of the dirty village beneath the shadow of the great rock; for a stranger with a white skin, and wonderfully-made garments, had suddenly walked into the midst of a group of women collected around the holy man's well, upon which with two dark-skinned companions she had seated herself. She asked the women all about the well; who had dug it, and what sort of water it was. When they found she could talk as they did, they forgot their shyness, and eagerly explained how the holy man Shivalinga had made a gift of it to the village, and in consequence had himself become as a god to them.

One of them even let down her water-pot with a long rope to show the stranger that the well was deep, and how cool and pure was the water-supply that it produced. She went further, and laughingly offered to let her try and draw for herself.

Then the white-skinned foreigner offered to read



AT THE WELL

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them a story from a little book she carried in her hand. This was a novelty to the girls at the well, for they never imagined it possible a "female" could read! Such an accomplishment was to them only reserved for the priests and the boys of the village. So, leaning against the wall, holding their shining water-pots, that gleamed like burnished gold in the afternoon sunshine, and otherwise disposing themselves in various picturesque attitudes, the village water-drawers listened to a marvellous story of another well that, like their own, was deep, that had been the gift of some long-revered father, and that became a resting-place for the stranger who sat thereon. They were not very good listeners, for they were more taken up with the appearance of the reader than with what she was reading, but gradually the charm of the story riveted their attention, and an indefinite idea shaped itself in the brains of some of the younger women that the teacher or guru sitting upon that other well in a far-away country was claiming to have powers higher and more god-like than Shivalinga who had given them the well.

"It is a false word," interrupted one of the women, and in excited tones she began to pour out in the village patois her conception of the story that was being read. The others gathered round her in admiration at her clear insight into matters, and joined her in declaring there could be no one greater than their revered benefactor Shivalinga.

The missionary and her Bible-women, glad to realise that there was one amongst the hearers

whose mind had been stirred into activity, waited until there was a lull in the discussion, and then craved permission to finish the story.

At the words, "Sir, Thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep," the women and girls smiled in appreciation, and once more began to chatter with each other about their own rich supply of water, and the merits of their own well as compared with that other one of which they had never before heard.

"Are there any more stories in your book, or are they all about water, wells, and women?" asked grey-haired old Owakka, who had been attracted by the group round the well.

"Yes, there are many other stories here, and nearly all of them are connected with the Great Guru named Yesu,¹ who sat on that deep well so many hundreds of years ago."

"That is a good word, and please come back and read it to us again. But our Shivalinga is greater than your Yesu; for he gave us this well and its sparkling sweet water, and we never heard before of your Guru, who has not given us water to drink."

The missionary left the village well with a feeling of shame for those who had received "to drink" from the hands of the weary Nazarene who once sat to rest upon Jacob's well, and, having satisfied their own souls' thirst, did not lift up their voice in chorus with the Spirit and the Bride to pass along the invitation, "Whosoever will, let him take of the Water of Life freely."

¹ Jesus.

CHAPTER XV
HER HEART'S DESIRE

“My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God.”—
Ps. xlii. 2.

CHAPTER XV

HER HEART'S DESIRE

“**A**MMMA, listen, and I will tell you words of joy that will help you in this life and the life to come.”

“The life to come! What do you know of the life to come? My boy is dead. What do I know of the life he is now living? Perhaps he is now in female form, and must live in this world many times over before he can attain to the privilege of being a man. Ah! why did he die? My beautiful boy with the laughing eyes and pretty caresses.” And the Hindu mother wept anew.

“Amma, do not mourn until your eyes become rivers of tears. Listen. God is One. He is a living and true God whom we see with our inner eyes. Moreover, He is a God of love. He looks at you, and knows all about you, and knowing you so well, He sees your tears dropping so thick and fast, and your heart overflowing with this bitter sorrow. He is grieved for you, and would have you come to Him for comfort and rest.”

“Amma, now you are surely deceiving me, and speaking words that are utterly false. God is One. That word is certainly true. But He is never sorry

for us in our grief. He writes our fate upon our foreheads when we are born, and that which is written must come to pass, and there is always more of sorrow than of joy to be fulfilled. We must follow the winding path of our fate, no matter where it leads."

"Amma, do not talk that way. Only listen while I tell you that God, the Holy and True One, loves you so much that He has provided a way for you, out of yourself, into His very presence. When you die, your soul does not pass into the body of another person; but God desires that your spirit shall live with Him, in His own abode of bliss, for ever and ever."

"Who ever heard before of a Holy and True God, and who knows the way to His happy resting-place?" said the bereaved mother, in tones of mocking incredulity.

"Amma, do you know the way to Bombay?" was the apparently irrelevant answer to this half-question, half-assertion.

"Ah yes," came the ready response. "You have only to go to the Central Station and get into the train bandy,¹ stay there quietly for two nights and a day, and then you are safely at your journey's end."

"Well, as surely as you know the way to Bombay, so surely can I show you the way to the God of Love. Amma," and the first speaker clasped her hands in entreaty, "let me come to your house and show you the way. I am a teacher; let me come."

¹ Carriage.

The speakers were two women, one a Christian, the other a Hindu, who had met accidentally in the early-morning bazaar. Both were intent upon buying from the vegetable bazaar the daily supply for their households.

The Christian woman was tall and well-made, with a very dark skin and jet black hair that rippled in waves and defiant little curls that no amount of cocoanut oil would reduce to the desired smoothness. A white muslin sari was wound gracefully around her, and beneath it peeped the hem of a pink print petticoat, while a neat little jacket of the same material covered the upper part of her body. Her only jewel was a fine neckband of small gold beads. In cleanliness and neatness she was an utter contrast to the woman with whom she talked, who was of the usual type of fairly well-to-do heathen women who thronged the food bazaar. She had come out without bathing her body, arranging her dress, or combing her hair. Her solitary garment, a washed-out silken sari, was worn in such a fashion as to leave neck, arms, and almost the whole of the upper part of her saffron-besmeared body exposed. A few faded flowers protruded from the knob of hair that Hindu fashion decreed should be dressed well to the side of the head, and jewels adorned her neck, nose, ears, arms, and ankles in a reckless profusion. Yet the richness of her outer attire could not hide the sorrow of her heart.

As she bargained with the indolent bazaar man, a young woman with a sturdy baby-boy on her

hip had stopped to inquire the price of some bandy kai,¹ and the child had stretched forth a chubby hand to grasp the flowers in her hair. Turning quickly to see the cause of the sudden pull at her hair, all the fountains of her pent-up grief had broken forth again at the sight of the beautiful child, that brought back all the tender memories of her own son, whose body had so recently been given over to the flames.

Then it was that Lydia, the Bible-woman, had ventured to inquire into the cause of such sorrow, and had sought to pour the oil of joy upon her mourning spirit.

Quite a group of idlers had gathered together to hear what the two were so earnestly discussing, but when the Bible-woman so calmly announced herself as a teacher of the New Way, they moved farther off, as though fearing the touch of the bright-faced, cleanly-dressed Christian. Thus the two were left practically alone to finish their conversation, and Lydia repeated her question.

"Amma, say only a word, that I may come and teach you how to walk in the way of peace and joy."

"No, no," said the Hindu mother. "Your God will do for you, and mine will do for me. All my people have walked in the old way. Why should I seek a new one?"

"Do not say this, Amma. The New Way is a beautiful way. This land of India is full of dead, useless idols, the work of men's own hands,

¹ A native vegetable.

but God is Great, and True, and Holy. He is the Living God, and would have all men, women, and children serve Him with their hearts and by their lives."

As Lydia spoke, she was disturbed in her train of thought by hearing behind her a low, chuckling laugh, that sounded like a spontaneous ripple of either merriment or pleasure. Turning to find out the cause of the laughter, she saw a diminutive woman of about twenty years of age. Poised gracefully on her head was a basket piled full of goods she had just purchased in the bazaar.

"Ah, Chinnamma,¹ who are you? and why do you laugh there all by yourself?"

"Why do I laugh, oh Periamma?² People usually laugh when the heart is glad."

The heathen woman was all attention now. Here was a new specimen of womankind. One who could laugh because she had a gladsome heart.

"I laugh for joy, because I heard you say the Living God would have all men, women, and children to serve Him. I was sure there must be a Living God somewhere, but where He lives, and how to get to Him, is what I want to know. Now you are telling this woman about Him, and I heard all you said, and I laughed out because I thought here is a teacher who knows the Living God. Amma, I want to know Him too. Teach me about Him, Amma; oh, teach me!" and the laughing face clouded over with the intensity of the soul's desire.

"Yes, yes, oh Chinnamma, I will teach you.

¹ Little mother.

² Big mother.

Come with me to my house, which is near by, and I will teach you all I know."

"Alas! how can I come? My mistress, an English lady, sent me to the bazaar this morning to buy in the day's provisions, and I must go back quickly, or she will be angry and punish me. But tell me where you live, and I will come some day and learn from you all about the Living God."

"Do you come to this bazaar every day?"

"Every day? No. Sometimes my mistress sends me, and sometimes she sends the cook."

"Will you come to-morrow morning, think you, Chinnamma?"

"I cannot tell, but if I do I will ask my mistress to give me leave to come and see you. Quick, quick, tell me where your house is."

"Nay, better than that, my daughter; I will myself come to this bazaar and meet you, and from here take you to my house."

"Salaam, Amma, salaam. I must go quickly now. Yes, I will come to-morrow, if possible. But tell me once again, is it true that there is a Living God?"

"It is true, oh little one! and, praise His Holy Name, His well beloved Son, Jesus, our Lord, ever liveth to make intercession for those who come to God through Him."

But the little heathen girl could not comprehend all this. Her heart was satisfied, for the time being, that God was alive and not dead, so she tripped off with light feet and a radiant face.

While Lydia and Chinnamma were talking, the third woman, who had been the connecting link

between the two, slipped away, and was lost amidst the thronging, chaffering crowds of buyers and sellers in the early-morning bazaar.

The next morning, Lydia, true to her promise, went back to the appointed rendezvous; but although she loitered about until nearly all the buyers had departed and the shopkeepers were preparing for their meal, not a glimpse did she catch of the eager-faced little woman whom she had come to meet.

For six mornings she had kept her tryst—all to no avail. On the seventh morning she started out again. A little disappointed, it is true, and with a feeling that her time was perhaps only being wasted, she walked around her usual haunts, stopping at each bazaar and scanning the faces of the women buyers, but no Chinnamma was amongst them.

Then on a little farther she slowly walked, till she came within sight of a fat old woman sitting in a doubled-up heap by a basket of jessamine flowers. Standing by her, in deep and earnest conversation, was the young girl she was in search of. She hurried her footsteps and came up to the pair just in time to hear the flower-seller say—

“Yes, yes, I know the Periamma with the curling hair and bright face, but I do not know where she lives.”

So intent were the two upon what they were talking of, that they had not seen Lydia coming, and when she spoke, saying, “Chinnamma, Chinnamma, I am here. I have sought you many days. Why did you not come before?” Chinnamma clung to her with a cry of joy, and the old woman, rising

hurriedly, in her awkwardness upset her flowers, as she exclaimed with religious fervour—

“Swami, Swami, it is herself. A spirit must have guided her here just at the minute we were talking of her.” But she stopped her further remarks, in consternation at the fate of her flowers lying in the dust, and quickly sought to rescue them from the sniffing pariah dogs and the dirty hands of the children, who had collected like magic around the overturned basket.

Taking advantage of the temporary confusion, Chinnamma drew Periamma on one side, and in excited tones said—

“Amma, Amma, I must be quick, so quick, I have only a few minutes to spare. After I saw you seven days ago, I went back to my lady and told her I had seen a teacher who knew of a Living God, and who had promised to tell me much about Him, and I begged her to give me leave to visit your house, so that I might learn all you had to teach me.

“My lady spoke very kindly, and said her heart was glad because I wanted to know about the True God, and she herself would teach me all there was to learn. Then every day since last I saw you she has taken me to her church, and there I saw many pictures and great images. I smelt the incense and the flowers, and carried a candle to be lit before a shrine. They showed me how to bow to the images, and to make a cross in the air with my hands. Then I talked to my lady again, and said her church was just like our temples, full of images and idols, and I did not want to worship such. Hearing what

I said, she became very angry, and called me a wicked, ungrateful girl, and threatened to send me back to Trichur, where she says my own people live, and they will soon see if I learn to worship true gods or false gods. My lady brought me from Trichur one year ago, to be Ayah to her baby. I don't think I have any people belonging to me. I never heard of them before. Now, Amma, tell me what I am to do."

The girl poured out her tale so rapidly that Lydia had much ado to follow her; but when she paused for breath she said—

"You must come home with me, and I will think what is to be done."

"No, no, Amma, I cannot come. See, here is the gardener who was sent with me to the bazaar this morning, to watch me, lest I should run away. I must go away now. But tell me first where do you live. If I can get away, I will come to your house and see you. Quick, Amma, tell me, and let me go."

"My house is 359 Peacock's Grove, nearly one mile away from here. I will pray to the Living God for you, and He will surely lead you aright. Salaam, Amma."

"Salaam," and the slim, earnest seeker after God disappeared in the throng.

Lydia's mission accomplished for that morning, she too turned homewards, there to work and wait, watching and praying for the girl who had crossed her path in so wonderfully strange a way.

Another fortnight passed by, and although Lydia

frequented the bazaar every day, she did not catch a glimpse of Chinnamma; for her mistress kept her closely at home, fearing, if she let her out of her sight, she might never see her again, so earnest had she been in pleading to be allowed to learn to read and write, so that she might read for herself the Christian Veda, that Lydia the Bible-woman taught.

Then one day Chinnamma found herself at liberty, away from the watchful eye of her mistress; for she was commissioned to go to Flag Bazaar to purchase some muslin that was needed for the baby's clothing.

"I will give you one hour, Ayahamma,¹ to go there and back," said her mistress, "and remember, it is your last walk out in Madras, for to-morrow night I will send you back to Trichur, and have no more to do with such a wicked, ungrateful girl."

"Ah, lady, lady, forgive me. I am not truly wicked. I'm only wanting to be good, so that some day I can live with God. Please do not send me away to Trichur, where I have no friends."

"I brought you from Trichur, and back there I will send you, and so be free from all responsibility concerning you. Go, go; I want no more to say to an ignorant native girl who despises Holy Mother Church. Go," and the lady waved her white hand in supreme annoyance that a mere coloured Ayah should show so much will of her own.

Ayahamma obeyed her, went forth into the busy streets of Madras, and accomplished her errand with lightning speed.

¹ Nurse.

A coolie woman waiting about Flag Bazaar, seeing Ayahamma making several purchases, salaamed to her, and begged to be hired to carry them home for her. The girl shrugged her thin shoulders and laughed a little scornfully at the idea of needing the help of a coolie. She was no great white Dhorasani¹ who could not carry her own parcel. Then an inspiration seized her, and she called after the woman whom she had dismissed with a shake of her head.

"Amma, do you know where Peacock's Grove is?"

"Peacock's Grove? Yes, I know the place."

"Do you know a big, dark woman, with curly hair, who lives in Peacock's Grove?"

"Do I know her? Yes, she is Lydia, the Bible-woman."

"Well, Amma, you show me the way to Lydia the Bible-woman's house, and I will give you an anna."²

"Come, and I will show you the way," and straightway the coolie started off, followed by Chinnamma in a fever of impatience lest she should be away from her mistress more than the allotted time.

At last No. 359 was reached just as Lydia, with bag and books in hand, was setting forth to do her afternoon's work.

She gasped in astonishment at seeing once more the girl for whom she had watched and prayed.

"Come in, come in, oh Chinnamma," she cried joyfully. "Where have you been all these weeks? How did you find my house? Oh, how happy I am.

¹ Lady.

² A penny.

to see you ! Sit down and I will make you coffee," she poured out in a torrent of questioning and welcoming hospitality.

"No, no, Amma ; even this time I cannot stay. My lady sent me out to the bazaar, and I took time to find you here to tell you I am being sent back to Trichur to-morrow, and perhaps I shall never see you again. Then how am I to learn about the Living God ?"

"Alas, alas ! tell me all about it."

"Ah, Amma, I cannot stay, but as sure as the God you speak of lives, and cares for me, I will come back to Madras and find you out. How, I know not at this moment. Do not keep me now. Salaam, Amma. I go and return," and she vanished out of the Bible-woman's house almost as suddenly as she appeared.

The next afternoon found Chinnamma gathering together her cloths and jackets, and tying a loaf of bread and her drinking-cup into a bundle, ready for starting on her long train journey to Trichur.

Her mistress made sure that she really went, for instead of giving the girl her own train fare, she sent it to the station in the hands of the gardener, with instructions that he was to get the ticket, see the Ayah safely into the train, and the train start for its destination.

Moreover, instead of paying Chinnamma the month's wages due to her, she had kept them towards defraying the cost of her journey south, and so the poor girl was sent off with only an eight-anna piece in her possession.

She kept a smiling face until the gardener had gone and the train was fairly on its way. Then looking round on her travelling companions, and finding herself in a carriage packed to overflowing with strange men and women, her courage failed her, and she cried bitterly; and while she cried, she pitied herself for being so forlorn. All the women around her had got either their husbands or their fathers to care for them on their journey. Only Chinnamma was alone, as far as she knew; for her eyes were holden, so that she could not see the shining angel of love hovering around her with sheltering outspread wings and watchful care, to see that neither harm nor fear should come nigh her.

Surely, too, it was the angel of comfort who touched the heart of one of the men in the carriage to motion to his wife, telling her to bid the lonely little Hindu maid cease her sobbing.

The sound of a woman's voice inquiring into the cause of her sorrow roused Chinnamma to reply. With quick intuition, she saw a sympathetic light shining from the black eyes of the matronly woman who, in obedience to her master's orders, had spoken to her. In her simplicity, she told all her trouble, and asked for counsel from this stranger, who was more ignorant than herself concerning this "Living God," the subject of her heart's desire.

"'The Living God,'" repeated one of the men to another, "she is wanting to learn about the Englishman's God. I have heard others call Him the 'Living God.'"

"Tell her to get out of the train at Arkonum, and

go back to Madras," said the man who had ordered his wife to speak to the crying girl.

Again the message of help was passed along.

"He says, get out of the train at Arkonum, and take another train to carry you back to Madras."

"Yes, yes, that is what I will do," said Chinnamma, happy at the thought, "and then I will seek out Lydia, who knows the Living God and the New Way, and she will teach me all I want to learn."

Comfort had come to her heart, and once again smiles of anticipation gathered on her thin face, as she lapsed into silence, making mental plans for her return to the city where lived the one friend in whom she reposed so much confidence.

So deep was she in thought that it seemed but a few minutes until the engine's whistle shrieked, and many of her fellow-passengers began gathering their mats and their bundles together; the train stopped, doors were flung open, the people streamed out of the carriages, and amidst the bustle and hurry of the general exodus Chinnamma found herself standing on the Arkonum railway station platform, separated from the kindly-faced woman who had spoken to her in the train, and feeling desperately alone—such an atom of humanity amongst the flotsam and jetsam of all that mighty travelling host on the Great South Indian Railway. What should she do next? When would a train start back to Madras? Where should she find it? Who would show her the way? were the questions that troubled her, as she watched the people changing from one train to another, and the majority of them intent upon continuing their jour-

ney, either up or down one or other of the many lines branching in different directions from the junction. She wandered up and down the platform, but no one took any notice of her. More trains came in, and steamed off again, and she mingled amongst the fresh crowds, but found no one to give her any advice.

It was getting late. Night had set in. Some of the railway officials were leaving the station for home, and others were preparing to lie down and sleep away the hours of waiting between the arrival and departure of the less frequent night trains. Still the lonely little seeker after Life and Truth walked up and down the platform, and round the station offices, peering about in a frightened way, trying to get her courage up to the point of speaking to someone who could help and direct her.

Once she ventured to sit down on a bench, but the coolies stared at her till she felt miserable, and then they began passing loud jeering remarks about her, and so she drew her sari more closely around her head and shoulders, and walked away to try to find a more retired spot in which to pass the night. Towards midnight silence settled over the whole station, and Chinnamma again ventured to sit down, this time within the shelter of some upturned, empty bread baskets.

She was tired out in body and in mind, and soon dropped off into a heavy, dreamless sleep; for it seemed but a few minutes of time could have passed when a blinding light flashed into her sleepy eyes, and a voice said, "These baskets must be returned

to Madras by the next train, which is due in a few minutes."

Chinnamma rose hurriedly, to find herself in the midst of a group of coolies, and close to her a courteous-looking Brahmin, who, seeing a white-robed female figure emerge from amidst the baskets, let out an exclamation of surprise at so unusual a sight as a solitary Hindu girl on a station platform during the early morning hours.

However, he had broken the silence, and his exclamation caused Chinnamma to utter the question she had wanted to ask all through the hours of waiting, and she burst out impetuously, "Oh, sir, do not be angry with me. Show me favour, and tell me how to get to Madras."

"Madras! Who are you? You must be a wicked girl to be alone in such a place at night. No respectable female wanders about alone."

"Alas! sir," she faltered, with downcast eyes and nervously twitching hands, "do not blame me. It is my misfortune to be so placed. See, I have my ticket. Please send me on to Madras."

The Brahmin looked at her ticket, and then gave it back, saying, "That ticket is for Trichur. It will not take you to Madras, and here comes the Madras train."

Then Chinnamma took her resolve, and with a beating heart she sought out and found a third-class carriage, and got in, not troubling herself in the least as to whether she had a ticket for Madras or not.

The train sped on its way, and in due time Perambur was reached. The ticket-collector came round,

demanded all the tickets, and Chinnamma passed hers to him.

The train was packed to overflowing; the guard took the tickets, nipped them hastily, to get through with the business as fast as possible, and was quite oblivious of the fact that he was carrying a passenger to Madras with a ticket that was supposed to be her passport to far-away Trichur.

In the grey dawn of early morning Chinnamma reached the city that she had quitted only twelve hours before. But the Central Station was a long way from Peacock's Grove, and for the third time in a few hours she found herself one amidst a surging crowd, not knowing which way to turn, or where to ask for help. But her unseen Heavenly Guardian was at hand, and led her safely on to a spot where she saw a woman being helped into a bullock cart, and heard directions being given to the driver as to where to take her.

Hearing and seeing this, a wave of joy rushed through her, and with an inarticulate cry of relief she too called a bandy man, got into his cart, and with a composed air of knowing exactly what she was doing, told him to drive her to No. 359 Peacock's Grove.

"Yes," said the man, "I understand," and off he started, through the awakening streets of the great city, carrying the tired little traveller on towards the dawning of a new life.

That Sunday morning Lydia and her daughter were astir earlier than usual, that they might be in good time for the morning service in the mission chapel.

The coffee was made and the oppams¹ were ready, just as cart wheels stopped at their door. In another second the slight, girlish figure of Chinnamma stood on the threshold.

Her eyes looked unnaturally big and timid, and she trembled with hunger, fatigue, and suppressed excitement in the great joy of finding herself safely within the shelter of Lydia's home.

The coffee and cakes were almost forgotten as Lydia, in the free love of her heart, prepared an oil bath and a change of clothes for the girl, whom she was sure the Lord had brought specially to her.

With loving care she washed her, braided her hair, and arrayed her in clean white garments that belonged to her own daughter.

Then over the refreshing coffee and cakes Chinnamma told her story, and Lydia praised the Living God for the deliverance He had wrought on behalf of the girl whom she knew to be amongst the called and the chosen of Him.

Chinnamma's future has yet to be lived. She is now under the care of a missionary, being taught more fully of the privileges that are hers because Jesus died and rose again a Mighty Victor over death and the grave.

¹ Cakes.

CHAPTER XVI
BY THEIR FRUITS

“ One possessed with a devil.”—MATTH. xii. 22.

CHAPTER XVI

BY THEIR FRUITS

YOGINI, the youthful wife of Krishna Rau, lay sick unto death. Her mat was in one corner of the women's courtyard, but it proved far too narrow for her to be kept within its limits, as in her delirium she tossed from side to side.

As the fever from which she was suffering increased, her ravings became wilder and wilder. The other women of the household grew terrified beyond measure, as with the waning light of the early evening the sick girl's mutterings became more incoherent and the twitchings of her body more convulsive.

There was not the slightest doubt in their own minds as to what was causing this last and youngest of their many sisters-in-law to behave so strangely.

White-haired old Asita, mother of Yogini's husband, sat in a huddled heap of despair because all her pleadings with her youngest son, Krishna Rau, had failed to make him yield the point of calling in the priest to exorcise the devil that she was sure had taken possession of Yogini.

How else could this frightful sickness be accounted for?

All her five daughters-in-law agreed with her

that there was nothing more to be done for Yogini as long as that demon sat in triumphant possession of her brain. At all costs he must be got rid of.

The terror was mainly for themselves, for what assurance had they that the evil spirit, in a wandering mood, might not at any moment forsake Yogini and claim one of them as his corporeal body, and, worse still, perhaps he might call to his aid other spirits more dreadful than himself to take possession of one and all of them.

They gathered round Asita, and mingled their cries with hers and with those of the delirious girl, beseeching their mother-in-law to use again and again her influence with Krishna Rau to get him to call in the aid of the priest to rid them of the awful terror that was in their midst.

"Amma, Amma," pleaded Kaliyana, her eldest son's wife, "tell to Yogini's husband the powers that Mantra Sastri possesses in working all sorts of wonders. His fame is all over the country. Ah! if only Mantra Sastri could be called in, the devil would flee at the sound of his invocations. No devil, however malignant he be, can resist Mantra Sastri. Remember how he has studied the mantrams until he himself has become a god of the universe; for are we not taught that 'all the universe is subject to the gods, the gods are subject to the mantrams, and the mantrams to the Brahmins'?"

"Yes, yes, tell all this to Yogini's husband, and surely he must let us have our way and call in Mantra Sastri," said Gauri, a girl of about Yogini's own age.

"What does this all avail, oh my daughters, with one like unto Yogini's husband? All this and much more have I brought to his mind, but he is firm in his resolve that none but the English woman doctor shall try and free Yogini from the devil raging within her. He laughed at me when I said the cause of her sickness was some prowling demon, and he declared that her illness was perfectly natural. Alas! alas! what more can I do?" and here the sick girl sat up on her mat, pointed a long thin finger straight at Asitamma, and screamed out some words that the women in their fear did not understand. But the action and the unnatural sound of the voice were quite enough to make them all, Asitamma included, beat a hasty retreat into another part of the house.

Krishna Rau was a wealthy vakil,¹ living in the country district of Ballapura. He had graduated with first-class honours from the Christian College, Madras, and afterwards had spent two years travelling in Europe. There, of course, he had not been able to preserve his caste.

To meet the necessity of the changing times through which India was passing, the Brahmins had framed certain rules and instituted certain ceremonies, the observance of which reinstalled a man into all the privileges pertaining to the caste into which he had been born.

If he had broken every rule of that caste by going to lands beyond the sea, and eating and drinking unclean food, and that in the company of

¹ Lawyer.

those who were themselves outcasts, it did not matter if, on their return to their native land, the prescribed ceremonies were gone through.

So while Krishna Rau was in England he enjoyed all the freedom of a Hindu abroad, and enjoyed it to his heart's content. Then when he returned to the land of his ancestors it was an easy matter to obliterate all traces of the defilement he had received from mingling too freely with outcast European men and women. With imperturbable gravity of demeanour he went through all the prescribed ceremonies, even to swallowing the disgusting decoction composed of the five natural products of the cow, the animal considered so sacred by all members of the Hindu community. And then, in spite of all the enlightenment that Western thought and Western travel had brought to him, he rejoiced with his family and his fellow caste men that he was once more a Brahmin of the Brahmins, a mighty divinity from priority of birth and superiority of origin, for had he not sprung from the very mouth of the Creator?

Soon after his readmittance into the Brahmin caste his final marriage ceremonies were completed, and he brought to his father's house his wife Yogini, the only daughter of his eldest sister. She soon settled down to her life amongst the numerous female relatives to whom her marriage had introduced her for the first time. It was not at all difficult for her Uncle Krishna to exchange relationships and become her husband, as all her life she knew it was decided that she should marry her uncle.

When her firstborn child proved to be a son, great were the rejoicings in old Rama Rau's household, for now, not only had he got five sons, but each of his sons was blessed with a male representative to perform his funeral rites when those ceremonies should fall due.

On the day that Yogini's little son was a fortnight old, when the women went to the tank for their usual supply of daily water, they were surprised to see below its still depths the dead body of a cow. How or when it had got in they did not know. Whether it had been drowned, or died from other causes, they did not trouble to inquire.

The cows and the buffaloes went to the tank to drink and also to wallow in the cool water, and it did not appeal to them as any great wonder if one of the animals got beyond its depth and could not get out again.

Anyway, there was the dead cow, and there was the water which they wanted for the baths, the curry, the coffee, and other drinking purposes. So they lowered their big brass pots into the tank, drew them up full of water, and went home to talk about the dead cow and to drink the impure water in which its already decomposing body had been discovered.

The day after the dead cow was found in the Brahmins' tank Yogini became ill, her temperature went up, and in three days' time she was raging with fever.

Of course no one connected her illness in any way with the fact that a cow had died and lain in

the tank of water from which their drinking supply was obtained.

Neither Asitamma nor Kaliyana attempted to relieve the girl in the early stages of her illness. Nor did they report any alarming symptoms to her husband until it was almost too late to save her life.

When Krishna Rau found out that his wife was really ill, the educational advantages he had enjoyed prompted him to send at once for the lady doctor, but his innate superstition, fostered by his mother, who in her turn was backed up by her daughters-in-law and granddaughters urged him to comply with their wishes, and send either for the native doctor or a Brahmin priest.

After delaying with the question for nearly twenty-four hours, his common sense prevailed, and he sent a letter asking the lady doctor to call at her convenience and see his wife, as she was slightly indisposed.

Miss Singleturne, knowing something of the women of Rama Rau's household, gladly went to see the ailing girl. She was at once alarmed at the condition in which she found the patient, and for a week she used all the remedies that her experience of tropical diseases suggested. Then came a day and a night when it seemed as though Yogini must die.

Miss Singleturne never left her side, but spent the time in administering medicine and nourishment at short intervals. Lovingly as well as professionally she tended the Hindu girl until she was satisfied that the fever had run its course, and all that Yogini

had to fight against was the overpowering weakness that followed in the train of the fever.

Then she went home to rest a while before seeing the other patients who were waiting to consult her. She left full directions with Asitamma as to food and medicine. These directions Asita promptly disobeyed, for she considered she knew much better than the English doctor what was the best food for one of her own caste to eat.

Besides, all the week of Miss Singleturne's close attendance upon Yogini, she had been nursing her resentment against her son for calling in a foreign medicine woman, against Miss Singleturne for her clever treatment of the sick girl, and against Yogini for responding to that treatment and showing signs of getting better, when Asita herself was convinced that nothing could make the devil-produced fever abate unless the devil were exorcised.

It was early morning when Miss Singleturne left the 'vakil's house, feeling thoroughly satisfied that Yogini had taken a decided turn for the better. She meant to return to her post some time during the afternoon, but she was unexpectedly called away to a village some miles distant, and so it was late at night before she was able to call at Krishna Rau's house and satisfy herself that her instructions were being carried out.

On driving to the Brahmins' quarter where the vakil lived, she was surprised to find quite a number of excited people about, while the sound of loudly-beaten tom-toms almost deafened her. As she wended her way through the streets she heard

mutters, that were quite clearly meant for her ears, of "caste spoiler," "foreign medicine woman." While she realised that the words were being used in connection with herself, she was at a loss to understand what had roused the anger of the people against her.

She had not forced herself into Krishna Rau's house, but had been admitted on his own invitation. During the week of her daily attendance upon his wife, she had had several consultations with him, and found him quite the polished, courteous gentleman, willing that she should have every opportunity afforded her for using all her knowledge and skill in relieving his wife. Being so sure of her welcome to the house, she got out of her carriage, and walked on to the front entrance, affecting not to hear the smothered remarks that she knew quite well were intended for her ears, but inwardly fearing a little for her patient's welfare. Reaching the house door, she called out, "Amma, Amma, may I come in?" and followed her words by walking through the hall, without waiting for a response to her query—just as she had done every day during the past week.

But at the entrance to the women's verandah she was stopped by the portly form of Krishna Rau's father, old Rama Rau. He made her a more than usually profound salaam, and begged her to wait one moment until his son Krishna held audience with her.

Even while they were talking, Krishna Rau appeared, and courteously invited Miss Singleturme to follow him into a large room furnished in English style. Here she sat down on one of the many

holland-covered chairs, with a good opportunity of viewing herself from all angles, for the walls of the room were literally covered with mirrors of every conceivable shape and size.

Then Krishna Rau addressed her in polished English, saying, "Madam, I thank you very much for your kind attention to my sick wife during this past week. She is now under the care of her spiritual physician, and will not require your attendance again."

Then the light burst upon Miss Singleturne, and she had much ado to control her voice as she said, "Mr. Krishna Rau, this is a very strange proceeding. Your wife was making excellent progress under my care, and without consulting me in the matter you send for another doctor. What am I to think of it?"

"Well, to be quite frank with you, Miss Singleturne, I have called in a priest to say prayers on my wife's behalf, and even now he is exercising his healing art upon the poor stricken child."

And here Krishna Rau affected to be deeply agitated on account of his wife's sufferings. Then did Miss Singleturne's heart sicken within her for the consequences to Yogini of a Brahmin priest's healing arts being exercised upon her.

Her scorn for Krishna Rau burned to find utterance, but for Yogini's sake she curbed her rising indignation, and pleaded to be allowed to see the girl, saying, "Your wife was really so much better this morning, and I was confident that in another week's time she would be gaining her strength again."

But I cannot answer for her if you let this priestly business run its course. Do let me see and help the poor child. Oh, Mr. Krishna Rau, be governed by your good sense, and leave her in my care."

"Madam, I cannot accede to your request," said Krishna Rau. "The fact is, after you left this morning she became alarmingly worse, and all day long her delirium has been frightful. The house servants, hearing her screams, have spread the report that my wife is possessed with a devil. When I came out of my office this afternoon, I overheard my coachman telling another bandy man that Krishna Rau's wife had an evil spirit within her. Think of the harm that such a statement will do me in my profession, madam."

The doctor made a movement of impatience at an educated man allowing himself to be influenced by such rumours, but it passed unnoticed by the vakil, who calmly continued, "Then when I arrived home, my mother grovelled at my feet, and with heart-rending cries assured me of the same fact, telling me, in addition, that all in the Brahmins' quarter were talking of me, and blaming me for not following the custom of our caste in sending for a priest to exorcise the devil. What can a man do under such circumstances? Of course it is all superstition, the fruit of their ignorance. I know it only too well. But I am in the hands of these people, whose servant I really am, and this madam knows quite well," and the lawyer bowed his head as though in deference to the lady's superior knowledge, and at the same time smiled his supercilious

smile, that irritated Miss Singleturne beyond endurance, but still she controlled herself.

"Then your decision is irrevocable? You will not allow me to see your wife?"

"Madam, in the scenes that are now being enacted, your presence would be unwelcome. May I have the honour of showing madam to her carriage?"

Miss Singleturne knew that she was dismissed. The doctor and the woman had been waging a warfare within her ever since she had been talking with Krishna Rau. For Yogini's sake the doctor had conquered the woman, but her woman's nature could no longer keep silence, and in her wrath she rose, and with blazing eyes said, "Mr. Krishna Rau, I despise you for the miserable specimen of mankind that you are. If your wife dies under the hands of her spiritual physician, as you call the ignorant charlatan who is this moment, through your permission, torturing that poor weak child, you will be her murderer; and if you were in England, that land of glorious liberty, you would be hooted down by an indignant mob, and the law would decree that you should be hanged by the neck until you were dead. Let me tell you that, in allowing this priestly exorcism, you are sinning against your light and conscience, and as surely as the sun is shining in India to-day God will require it of you. You are no ignorant, superstitious coolie man, but a man with all the enlightenment that Western education can bring and does bring. You are so astute in reasoning that you have become a leader in your profession, and yet you stoop to this act of wickedness. Oh,

men like you make me sick at heart for the future of India's women! You can advance and make for yourselves a future, but they must live in the past and be governed by the past. Again I say I despise you, nay, I loathe you, that you should be called by the name of man."

All the time Miss Singleturme had been speaking, Krishna Rau's sarcastic smile had been gathering round his full lips. He smiled to hide his annoyance at the very plain speaking to which he was listening. It was a new experience for him to have a woman lift her voice in condemnation of his actions. It required all his rallying powers to still smile, and say in gentle tones, "Pardon me, Miss Singleturme. I have lived in England, and I have also seen an Englishwoman in a temper before this morning. Perhaps the English ladies think it becoming to them, as it causes their pale faces to flush a rosy red. Oh, I think myself fortunate that I was born a Hindu and not an Englishman!" But the last words reached Miss Singleturme from the distance, for she walked out of the room and sought her carriage, fearing lest she should be further tempted to use her tongue uselessly on behalf of Yogini and the thousands of women who, like her, are the victims of Hindu superstition.

Miss Singleturme had failed, but Asitamma had succeeded. The old lady had gained her point, and her heart was genuinely glad when a messenger was sent off post-haste for Mantra Sastri, the man who, by studiously repeating in their right order, and with the exact intonations, the syllables, "Am, Im,

Um, Em, Aim, Om, Aum, Tam, Tham, Dham, Nam, Pam, Pham, Bam, Mam, Yam, Ram, Lam, Vam, Sam, Ham, Ksham," had acquired the reputation of a miracle-monger and a devil-exorcist.¹

It was perfectly true that Yogini, the young wife and mother, was sick unto death, but well or ill, strong or weak, she must be made to go through all the ceremonies pertaining to the wicked art of driving out the devil that was said to be within her. The priest had been privately summoned by Asita a week before Krishna Rau gave his sanction to his being admitted to the house; and so he was in readiness to obey the official call as soon as it was delivered to him. He was all the more willing to exercise his priestly function, for he knew Krishna Rau was reputed to have a plentiful supply of rupees quite apart from old Rama Rau's shining hoards, and he reckoned that the cloth and the mat, as well as the money he would receive for the performance of his duties as demon-exorcist, would add materially to his own banking account.

Getting a plentiful supply of water from a cow he kept specially to yield him the fluid he must necessarily use in his ceremonies, and carrying a

¹ A mantra is a text from the Veda. Instead of a prayer or an invocation, it generally becomes a spell or a charm, the very sound of which, if properly uttered and repeated according to prescribed formularies, has in itself a mystical power for good or evil. These mystical letters or syllables are employed for brevity to denote the name of the deity to whom it may be addressed, or some part of the body over which that deity presides. "Am" is said to denote Shiva, "Lam" the earth, "Nam" the mind, "Dham" the tongue, "Nam" the nose, "Pam" the ear, "Yam" the heart, etc.—*Hinduism*, p. 128. Monier Williams.

fine gold wire in his hand, the noted Mantra Sastri entered Krishna Rau's house, and was soon conducted to the part of the verandah where Yogini lay tossing in wildest delirium.

Asitamma told the priest the story of Yogini's illness, and about the daily visits of the English doctor. When she had got thus far in her recital, Mantra Sastri became furious, and demanded what they expected him, a holy Brahmin, to do with a female who had lost her caste through being touched by an Englishwoman, and, in addition, drinking vile, poisonous foreign drugs.

Having puffed out his anger like smoke through a bamboo, his mandate went forth. Yogini must be readmitted into caste before there was any hope of the devil within her being expelled by his priestly invocations.

So he set Kaliyana and her daughters to thoroughly clean up the house, and to smear the floor of the women's court with cow dung softened in water until it became a semi-fluid. Then over the freshly-cleaned floor he instructed them to trace some elaborate and artistic patterns with powdered chunam, sprinkling the white powder lightly through their fingers. While the cleaning and decorating was going on, Asitamma brought to the priest a kampatti¹ of charcoal.

With a hand punkah she gently fanned the charcoal into a clear red heat, and into this Mantra Sastri inserted his piece of thin gold wire. His long experience of this instrument of torture soon told him when it was heated sufficiently for his purpose.

¹ An earthen vessel.

Quickly drawing it from the fire, he ordered poor sick little Yogini to open her mouth and put out her tongue. But the girl was too delirious to obey him, and it took all the strength of Kaliyana to hold her while Asita forced open her mouth, and the priest pushed the heated gold wire across her fever-parched tongue.

Now Mantra Sastri's intention was simply to brand the tongue, but he did his work clumsily, and the burning wire caught Yogini's lips as well as her tongue, and, in increased terror at the new pain, she wrenched herself free from the hold of Kaliyana and Asita, and struck out wildly at the nearest object, which happened to be Mantra Sastri's nose.

The priest recoiled, and was fain to rub the organ that Yogini in her unconsciousness had caused to smart—far, far less than the pain he had knowingly inflicted upon her.

The pure gold and the purifying fire had done their work, Mantra Sastri averred. Yogini was once more a member of the Brahmin caste, reinstalled by means of fire and pain. Now the priest could exert his power in casting out the tormenting devil from the sick girl.

It was with much expenditure of strength that Asitamma and her four daughters-in-law managed to drag and half-carry Yogini to the prepared room, and seat her opposite the chunam design on the floor.

In her weakness she could have lain prostrate on the ground; but the priest could not allow such a posture. He was powerless to exorcise a devil in

a recumbent position. So Asitamma put her back to Yogini's, thus making a support for her from behind. Kaliyana grasped her right arm, while Gauri held her up by the left.

The priest was anxious to go through with his work without receiving any more harm from the devil he was seeking to call forth. So he paid no heed to Yogini's moans and delirious ravings, but leaving her female relatives to struggle with her and get her into the right position, he picked up his chumbu of cow's water, and repeating mantrams over it, he solemnly marched round and round the house, sprinkling the sacred water as he went. Meanwhile the strains of the tom-toms grew louder and more discordant, and so drowned the cries of the girl within the house. Again the priest entered the house, and with the aid of the women gathered around, he forced some of the cow's water down Yogini's throat, and then sprinkled some of the same sacred fluid over her head.

This part of the ceremony satisfactorily performed, he signalled for all the relatives, who had quickly assembled at the call of the demon-exorcist, to enter the women's verandah with their new earthenware trays of fruit, flowers, leaves, and rice. These they carried round and round in a circle, and then, affecting to despise the leaves with which the trays were laden, they took them outside, and cast them out of sight, as undesirable parts in the programme.

The tom-toms beat on, and with every resounding thud on the drum-like instrument of torture for pain-

racked bodies, Yogini's frenzy seemed to increase ; apparently her weakness had vanished, and she almost fought with the women, who themselves were becoming exhausted in struggling to keep her in the required upright position.

The priest took no notice, for he too was rapidly working up to the pitch of excitement that his soul loved. The whole room seemed charged with electricity. From one to the other the waves of excitement passed, till, with the noise from the players on instruments, the wild invocations of the officiating priest, and the struggles and cries of Yogini, the whole party was like to become maddened in turn.

Still the priest must get to the end of his exorcism. So he took the white, the yellow, and the blackened rice from the trays, and placed them in three heaps before the devil-possessed woman, and addressing her said—

“ Oh spirit of evil inhabiting this woman, where do you come from ? What do you want ? ”

At his question a silence like death fell on the assembled relations and friends. Surely this was magic. A few words able to change the mad frenzy of scores of people into a solemn silence !

But they became silent in the intensity of their desire to hear the devil's reply to the priest's question.

Asita, Kaliyana, and Gauri loosed their hold of Yogini, as they listened to catch any word that should fall from her lips.

Without their aid she could not sit up, and with

a thud she fell forward into the heap of rice that had been blackened with ashes.

The women, recalled to their duty by this accident, promptly lifted the sick girl up, and the priest again addressed her.

"Where do you come from? What do you want?" adding as a further inducement to the devil to reply, "What you want, that will I give you."

Yogini's fall seemed to have stopped her mad ravings, for when the priest addressed her the second time, she merely leaned, with shut eyes, a heavy weight against the women who held her. The third time the priest used all his arts to try and make her speak, and tell from whence the demon came, and what his object was in coming. But no, the tormented girl was too far gone to make any reply.

The priest must have an answer to his question, or the devil would remain, and all his previous work be rendered void, so he resorted to another expedient to make the unconscious girl speak. This time he seized a rattan,¹ and began to beat his victim. At first gently, and then gradually increasing the speed and the weight of his blows, he beat with the determination of conquering the sullen spirit by mere brute force. Some of the blows coming in the direction of the older women, they let go their hold of Yogini, leaving her to receive the full force of all that was meant for the evil spirit within her.

Then a horrible thing happened. Yogini's eyes

¹ A thin cane.

flew open, and seeing the electric eyes of the priest bending over her, a current of power seemed to pass from him to her, and in her death-struggle she rose, and ran round the room twice, the priest running after her, still beating her to inspire her to further effort. But her last inspiration had come, and with one long, convulsive shudder, she lay, oh ! so still.

As she fell, a great shout of triumph went up from the priest, the women, and the onlookers, while the tom-toms outside took up the refrain, and in discordant, blatant tones announced the fact to the respectable Brahmin street that the demon had fled from the wife of Krishna Rau, the popular wakil.

At the spot where Yogini fell, the devil was supposed to have taken his departure, to come back no more. She was pure within, and now her body would have to be cleansed.

While the women carried her outside, bathed her in cold water, and dressed her in a new cloth, the priest must kill a chicken over the spot where she had fallen, divide it out into palatable morsels, and there leave it for the devil to make a meal of.

When the frenzy of madness evoked by the devil's defeat had subsided a little, the women approached the prostrate Yogini, to carry out the rest of the programme for her complete restoration to health; but as they laid hands on her to carry her outside, they drew back in horror, to find that if, as they supposed, the devil had gone, Yogini had gone too, for it was a cold dead thing they touched instead of the bright, beautiful girl, who, less than a year ago,

had entered their midst as the bride of Krishna Rau.

Superstition had done its work, and so had Mantra Sastri, the licensed devil - exorcist. Both must receive their wages. In this instance superstition claimed death as its reward; and the priest, for yielding superstition its full toll, claimed a new cloth to cover his body by day and a new mat to repose on during the hours of slumber.

The death of Yogini in no wise detracted from the fame of Mantra Sastri, for none believed her sudden decease was due to his treatment of her. Rather, eyes of suspicion were cast upon Miss Singleturne, and for months she suffered from the effects of the rumours that the priest and his coadjutors took good care should be circulated amongst the ignorant townsfolk, who firmly believed in the power of her evil eye to work them ruin, ending in untimely death.

CHAPTER XVII
WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?

“But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was : and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, . . . and bound up his wounds.”—LUKE x. 33.

CHAPTER XVII

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?

A HOUSE, a cottage, a hut, a hovel, or a stable —which was it? Under any known name for a human habitation it defied classification; but it was home, in the Hindu acceptation of the word, for three men, their wives and families, their old mother, six goats, a few dozen fowls, a favourite cow, two mangy dogs, and an almost innumerable host of living creatures that sheltered in the crannies of the walls, the mud of the floors, the turbans of the men, and in any other conceivable place that was likely to nourish life. Rats, bats, crows, bandicoots, snakes, mosquitoes, all found safety and shelter within and around those mud walls that formed the place where Tippannah lived.

Now Tippannah was an important man in the village of Hālupura. He had succeeded his father as headman of his caste, which was somewhat low down in the social scale. The whole village of about two hundred people really formed one big family, for they had married and intermarried in the usual Hindu fashion, until the relationships were hopelessly mixed up.

Although the village was small, it boasted several

ruling deities in different forms of repulsive ugliness. None of the people knew why they worshipped these idol gods. Their ancestors, farther back than they could count, had made the shrines and set up the idols. They had been taught as children to bring their offerings and lay them before the blocks of stone, the figures of the serpent, and underneath special trees. It was their custom so to do. They asked no questions as to the why or the wherefore, but simply accepted what their fathers had done before them as the correct thing, and walked along the time-beaten path of their village religion, never dreaming that there was anything more to be desired.

But one day a stranger found her way into their midst, and told them of many new things concerning One God and Father of all. For nearly a year the visitor came and went, standing in the streets, surrounded by the villagers, who listened as she sang and talked of her own religious teacher, who, so she declared, had a message for them as well as for herself.

Then one day Ruthamma, the Bible-woman, sat down under the juniper tree, and pondered over her work in the village of Hālupura. There Miss Thomson found her, and from the darkening depths of the overshadowing tree she drew the native girl, and together they made another attempt with the people in Hālupura, and that day they received an invitation to enter within the doors of Tippiannah's home.

Ruth was amazed at the change in the attitude of the people, and with a new gladness she followed



STREET PREACHING

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in the wake of Miss Thomson, who, by stooping well down, got under the doorway without knocking the scalp off her head.

The women bustled round to give her a fitting welcome. One tall girl slapped a cow sharply in its face to make it move out of the way, so that Miss Thomson could step across an unwholesome drain, that wound its almost stagnant course through the room where she was to sit and teach. This open channel seemed to be the means of exit for all the drainage and waste matter of the household, but custom makes all the difference in a man or a woman's life, and even the nose of a European missionary has to learn certain little details in the matter of self-control.

Another woman disappeared into a darker chamber still, and came back with a thick black blanket which she spread on a raised mud seat, and with many expressive gestures she signified that it was her pleasure Miss Thomson should sit thereon.

Meanwhile the village clan had gathered, and they crowded in and around the small room, some of the more adventurous of the boys climbing on the roof, and so filling up the parts that were open to the sky, until what with the women, the half-grown children and the babies, the cow, the goats, the chickens, and the determined attacks of the dwellers in the woolly black blanket, the drain trickling at her feet, and the lack of ozone in the atmosphere, Miss Thomson was fain to ask herself, "Who is my neighbour?" As she looked at the dirty unkempt women, with their stolid faces often showing unmistakable marks of

degradation, she had to pray, "Lord, open my eyes that I may see, beyond these rough material, caskets holding a jewel of worth and beauty. Thou dost hold a key which unlocks these caskets. Oh, raise Thou the lid, and show to me the living gem which Thou hast named an immortal soul."

Gradually the audience arranged itself, and after many curious questions had been replied to, Ruth suggested that she should sing to them about One named Jesus, the Friend of women especially, and of all mankind in general.

"Yes, yes, you may sing," called out several voices at once.

So she began, and had got through four lines of the first verse of

"What a friend we have in Jesus,"

when a goat imagined it wanted to get out of the crowd, and it began to butt so vigorously with its horns that the women and children laughingly huddled closer together to make way for it, and a mischievous boy gave it a few resounding slaps, and whooped loudly to hurry it along.

Ruth paused in her singing, and then began the first verse again. This time she got to the end of it, and was just about to begin the second, when another interruption came in the shape of a kite, that, smelling afar the odour of a dead fowl hanging from the roof, descended through one of the many apertures at the top of the dwelling, and with a flap of wings, a rush and a snatch, rose in triumph skywards, with its feathered prize held in strong grip.

Then arose a disturbance. The room was cleared, as the women rushed out pell-mell, screaming and clapping their hands, to try and make the kite drop the chicken.

But all to no avail. The kite was the bird in possession, and the bird he had secured he meant to keep.

Again the audience reassembled, bubbling over with excitement at losing the chicken, and again Ruth essayed to sing through her hymn, and this time she finished it to the screaming accompaniment of a sick baby, with a quarrel between two children as an interlude. One of the boys fell headlong over Miss Thomson, while the other slipped into the vile drain of waste liquids.

Old Kamunda, Tippannah's mother, tried to seize the culprits to administer some chastisement, but there being neither clothes nor hair to lay hold of, they slipped through her fingers, and took refuge underneath the cow, where they glared at each other, ready to finish out their fight as soon as an opportunity presented itself.

The singing was scarcely ended before Kamunda looked at the Bible-woman, and pointed at the missionary, as she demanded, in tones above the babel that was ready to burst forth, "Is she married?"

"Not married! What a misfortune. Poor thing! Can't she get anyone to marry her?"

"Is she white all over, or is it only her face and hands that are that strange colour?"

"Where are her jewels?"

"Is her dress made of silk or cotton?"

Patently Ruthamma answered all the questions, but evidently not to the satisfaction of the questioners, for one answer only brought out another query, and Ruth felt her time was slipping away, so at last she said—

"Now, you have had your turn, let me have mine, and I will tell you a story. Pay much attention. Listen well, and you will understand."

So Ruth began, and as she talked Miss Thomson bore her up in prayer before Him who is mighty to prevail.

"In past ages, there lived a coolie man who earned his daily rice by carrying for hire baskets of tamarind from his village to the market town. When the tamarind was ripe, he made his journeys by day and by night. The way was long, and often lonely. When no moon shone forth, the nights were dark, and it was on such nights that wicked men would hide behind rocks and trees, ready to pounce on the passers-by as suddenly as the kite came down upon your chicken. One night this coolie man was running and walking by turns, when from behind a rock two men sprang upon him, and with long bamboo sticks struck him many times on the face, the back, and the head. They knocked from his head the basket of tamarind, and one of them ran away with it, and the other one pulled off his turban and his loin cloth, and then beat him again, until he was nearly dead. Then he lay on the ground, with the blood flowing from his mouth and the cuts in his head."

"Alas ! poor man," said Kamunda, who had settled down to a little fancy work in connection with one of her granddaughter's heads. "I hope those dogs of thieves were caught. You understand, the poor man was bleeding and wounded," and she began to give her version of the story to the other listeners.

"Listen, oh mother, and let me tell the rest," said Ruth.

"All night long the poor coolie man lay by the roadside, naked, bleeding, and dying. When the birds began to twitter, and the early-morning lizards to 'tweet,' a Brahmin passed that way, and, when he saw the coolie lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road, relieved that the sun had yet no power to cast shadows, and so he had escaped being touched by the shadow of the wounded man."

Some of the women laughed knowingly, for in their low estate they had experienced the chilling pride of the lordly Brahmins, who in the crowded streets sought to avoid them too, lest they should be a cause of defilement to them.

Ruthamma saw, and understood, but she kept bravely on with her story, and Miss Thomson rejoiced to see the signs of the soul within lighting up the faces of the women by even this little sign of appreciation of what was being said to them.

"After a short time, a guru, on his way to receive his dues from some village folk, came along, and he too could not help seeing the coolie man lying by the roadside. He crossed the road to see what had happened, and when he saw that the wounded man was one from whom he generally reckoned to receive

a few limes, sighed for himself because he thought the man to be dying, and so he would never more receive an offering from him. Then he walked quickly away, thankful it was daylight and there was no fear of his being overtaken in the night, robbed by thieves, and then left for dead.

"Towards midday, another stranger driving a buffalo bandy came that way. He was a pariah man. Quite an outcast. Even the Sudras¹ despised him, reckoning him far too unclean to eat rice with.

"He too saw the naked, bleeding coolie man, and immediately he stopped his buffalo, jumped down from the front of his cart, and kneeling beside the half-dead man, he said, 'Oh! oh! my friend, you are in a bad state. What has happened? Ah! I see. Thieves have robbed and beaten you,' and all the time he was talking this way, he was lifting up the coolie's head from the hot ground, and placing some straw beneath it from the cart. Then he got his own chumbu, and from it poured water down the sick man's throat. Afterwards he tore some strips from his turban and tied them round the deep cuts in his head. By this time the poor coolie was feeling a little better, so the pariah helped him into his cart and took him along to the first chatram he came to. You know the sort I mean. The rest-houses for weary travellers, that great saints build to gain merit for themselves. There the pariah left the coolie, and told the old grandmother who was in

¹ The fourth and lowest caste, supposed to have sprung from the feet of the Creator.

charge of the chatram that on the morrow he would be returning that way, and that if she took good care of the sick man he would share with her the wages he expected to receive that day for driving the buffalo bandy."

Silence had gradually fallen on the interested listeners. Even the boys dodging behind the cow had forgotten their thirst for vengeance; for Ruth talked on with charm of action and voice, and by the time she got to the application of her story they were all in an attitude of expectancy.

"Only one more little word will I say. You know the Brahmin and the guru of my story; but you never saw or heard of a man like the pariah with a heart of tenderness for the suffering coolie.

"I want to tell you that God is like that pariah man. When we are in trouble, and our hearts are bleeding with wounds, that only we know about and others cannot see, He will draw near to us and let us drink from the chumbu of His love the pure water that will revive our fainting spirits and give us strength to go on the next part of our journey. He will help us even more than that pariah helped the coolie who was attacked by thieves"— But she got no further, for a girl, who had stood twisting a cow's tail all the time Ruth had been speaking, burst out into a derisive laugh, which she choked down to say, "Amma, the story was good. But you don't know God, if you say He is kind like the pariah man. No, no, God is like the Brahmin. He leaves us to our fate. He is like the guru, and deserts us in our

hour of need, if we cannot bring enough flowers and fruit to lay on His shrine."

"Don't talk, don't talk," commanded old Kamunda. "The Amma is talking of her God, not of yours. I suppose she knows her own God better than you do."

"No, no, you are wrong, little sister," said the Bible-woman, addressing the first speaker. "What I say about God is a true word. It was love in the heart of the pariah man that made him help the poor coolie. How did that love come into his heart except from God? If God can make one man love and care for another in such a fashion, then He must know what love is Himself, and so I say again God is kind and loving, and will treat us as lovingly as the pariah treated the coolie."

"Well, perhaps your God is that way, but our god is different," averred the girl, and she turned sharply round and ordered some of the younger children to go quickly and bring in the evening's supply of water.

"It is time to cook our evening food. You must not stay any longer. You can go, Amma," said another of the women, and at her words of dismissal there was a jostling and a pushing on the part of the children to get out of doors, so as to be first in the field to watch the white stranger and her companion take their departure.

A hymn had been sung amidst much disturbance, and a story told with the underlying truths it contained cut short in their application.

Had the time thus spent been wasted?



OLD KAMUNDA

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Was it an altogether fruitless effort? Did the women understand any part of what the Christian teachers had been aiming at?

Old Kamunda was wrinkled and dirty. Her tousled grey hair looked quite innocent of any acquaintance with soap, water, comb, or oil. She was bent, too, with the burden of her years, and her work in the fields side by side with her husband, sons, and grandsons.

She wore no jacket to cover the upper part of her body, and the sari that was twisted round her loins, and fell as a petticoat about her bare legs, was colourless, either from age or dirt. Her eyes were sunk in her head, and the few teeth that yet remained to her were like little stumps of ebony in her gums from the constant application of a special blackening dye, the pride of a Hindu mother's heart.

Truly a very earthen vessel was old Kamunda, mother of Tippiannah, the headman of the village of Hālupura. Was there anything pertaining to a treasure intrusted to her keeping?

A month after the visit of Ruthamma to the village of Hālupura, Kamunda was returning home from her weekly visit to the bazaar. Behind her, carrying on her head a well-stocked basket, walked one of her granddaughters. Just before they arrived at the Vulture's Gate, a sick beggar, seeing her laden basket, accosted her by meekly folding his hands before his face and making salaam, while he whined out with the ease of accustomed usage, "Amma, Amma, have mercy, have mercy! Hunger, pain,

and grief like watch-dogs keep me ever in sight. Give me food, food," and he slapped his stomach to emphasise his need.

Kamunda stopped, looked at the man, and remembered. What? Ruthamma's story of a month ago flashed through her seldom-used brain, and a wave of God-given pity swept over her heart.

To the surprise of the beggar she spoke. "Poor man! Have you pain? Where is your pain?"

"The hunger pain is here," and he smacked his stomach again. "The grief pain is here," and he clasped his hands around his head. "Do not ask of any other pain, Amma. Look!" and he thrust out his foot, from which his big toe hung crushed and bleeding.

"Oh! oh! poor man!" With the expressed pity, the treasure leapt up into Kamunda's sunken eyes, making them brilliant with the reflected light from within. Then the pity broke out into action as she unhesitatingly whipped out the end of her sari that was tucked around her waist, and tore strip after strip off it, and with unskilful fingers tried to bind up the man's lacerated toe.

"If only I had some sagnai¹ I would put that on your toe, and then bind it up, and it would soon be better again. Poor man! poor man!" and she heaped into his outstretched cloth several measures of grain and some curry stuffs.

Her granddaughter looked on in amazement at the old woman's unusual conduct. If she had dared, she would have remonstrated with her.

¹ One of the natural products of the cow.

But Kamunda's back looked a little straighter as she rose from her lowly attitude in the dusty road, and somehow her face did not seem quite so dirty with that new light shining through her eyes.

At last the girl could restrain her curiosity no longer, and over Kamunda's shoulder came the question, "Oh grandmother, why did you touch that dirty beggar man, and wrap up his bleeding toe with a piece of your sari?"

"Why did I do it?" Surely there was a softening in the old woman's voice as she gave the explanation of her strange conduct. "When I saw that man, hungry and bleeding, I thought of the story that the stranger woman told us on last new moon day, and I wanted to know how it felt to do something that she said her God had put into the pariah man's heart to do. She said love made the pariah help the coolie, and I wanted to find out what love was like."

The girl behind wondered and walked on, kicking up plenty of dust with her steady, swinging pace.

It took her some time to digest what she had heard, and then to frame her next question.

"Oh grandmother, did you find out what love was like?"

"Yes, what the woman said was love must have come to me. When I bound up the beggar's toe, it made a little trickle and gurgle come inside me like the splash, splash of rain on the shingle beds of the river after a season of drought."

The first softening touch of the oil of joy had begun its work in old Kamunda's heart.



CHAPTER XVIII

SECURE IN ZION

"Woe to them that are secure in Zion."—AMOS vi. 1.

*"Rise up, ye women that are at ease; hear my voice,
ye careless daughters; give ear unto my speech."*—ISA.
xxxii. 9.

CHAPTER XVIII

SECURE IN ZION

LONDON lay, a sun-stricken city, sweltering under a midsummer sky. Those whose business forced them to be out in the blazing sunshine spoke languidly of tropical heat and equatorial sunshine. The bus horses panted and perspired as they toiled on through the heated thoroughfares of the city, and occasionally the poor dumb creatures almost succumbed to the heat, hardly responding in the least to the huge cool sponges that, at intervals along the wayside, were kept in readiness to be applied to their foreheads. The bus conductors supplied their passengers with tiny fans to try and get a breath of air to move within the stifling conveyance; but still the sun blazed away, all unmindful of how his unusual energy was affecting man, woman, and beast alike.

In spite of the outside heat, Mrs. Olliver had contrived to keep her drawing and dining rooms comparatively cool, and at three o'clock on that scorching afternoon at the end of June they represented a perfect bower of beauty.

The sliding doors between the two rooms had been folded back, and over the archway thus formed, lilies, roses, and ferns were arranged in artistic pro-

fusion, while flowers of blending hues and delicate odours filled every available vase, till the rooms presented a dream of refreshing delight on that weary, hot afternoon.

The chairs were arranged as if for a meeting, and the lady of the house, dressed in perfect accord with her beautiful surroundings, flitted like a restless butterfly in and out of the rooms, putting a last touch here and rearranging a trail of flowers there, apparently not quite satisfied with the efforts of herself and her well-trained maids to provide a harmonious effect in the decorations of her beautifully-furnished home.

Mrs. Olliver was young and wealthy. In a moment of generosity she had placed her rooms at the disposal of some ladies who wished to hold a missionary meeting, first to discuss ways and means for increasing their subscriptions to the Foreign Mission cause, and secondly, to hear a lady speak of the work she had been doing amongst the Chinese women in some remote inland city with an unpronounceable name.

Must it be confessed that the happy bride of a few months had thought little about the meeting and its objects; but she had spent an infinite amount of thought, time, and money upon her preparations for the day when so many ladies from the church to which she herself belonged would for the first time cross the threshold of her bridal home. She wanted them to be lost in amazement at its beauty, wealth, and refinement, and—yes, there certainly was a lurking desire in her vain little heart that some of

her girl friends might even envy her the lovely and varied possessions that had become hers upon her marriage.

But the day had dawned one of London's hottest, and the flowers that had been purchased regardless of cost might fade even before the eyes they were intended to dazzle should rest upon them.

Perhaps the cream might turn sour, and in spite of much care the ices might possibly melt, and, darkest doubt of all, the ladies might be afraid to venture out in the trying heat. Thus many little bridges of disagreeable anticipations were mentally crossed and recrossed by young Mrs. Olliver's daintily slippered feet before the hour for the appointed meeting had struck.

But the girl's fair face was unruffled, and her white Japanese silk gown, new for the occasion, hung in soft, becoming folds around her slim figure as she stood in smiling expectancy to welcome her first guest, who happened to be the secretary of the missionary committee. She was a fine, earnest, large-souled woman, who threw heart and time into the work with a devotion worthy of imitation by all who seek to have a part in bringing about the glorious time when all the ends of the earth shall remember and turn unto the Lord, and when He shall in deed and in truth be the Governor among the nations.

After the secretary came the chairwoman for the afternoon, and then the visitors began to arrive in earnest, till at last the pretty little hostess's heart was at rest on the score of the attendance.

At half-past three her spacious rooms were filled

with a brilliantly-dressed throng of women, who, as they would have explained, out of deference to the home they were going to, and to the social status of their hostess, had bowed to the demands of fashion, and so had donned their lightest and gayest attire for the women's missionary meeting.

The dresses of the younger women and girls were marvels of lightness, colour, and texture; the flowers in their hats set up an unblushing rivalry with the natural beauties scattered so sweetly all over the room. Necklaces of gold and precious stones gleamed on white exposed throats, while bangles, rings, and chains flashed and glittered wherever a hand fluttered the leaves of a hymn-book or a neck was craned to watch the advent of the latest comer.

The missionary from China arrived, and when she was seated at the right hand of the chairwoman, a sweet-faced little widow lady, the meeting began by the singing of a well-known and oft-repeated missionary hymn.

Then someone prayed, an earnest prayer it was, too, that God, the Father of all mankind, would bless the work of His servants toiling far away from home, friends, and congenial surroundings in the midst of darkest heathenism; that He would raise up many from amongst the daughters of Christian lands, who with sympathetic hearts at leisure from themselves should hear the Divine voice bidding them go forth to carry the gospel of light, liberty, and love to their sisters, bound in lifelong servitude to superstition, darkness, and spiritual death; that hearing the voice they should arise in their youth

and strength and go joyfully forth, bearing the precious seed that in God's own time should spring up and yield to the patient, loving sowers the hundredfold reward.

After the prayer came another hymn, and then the business part of the meeting commenced in real earnest.

There was a short report of what the committee had attempted to do, and of work that unfortunately had been allowed to lapse for want of funds.

Then the collectors were called upon to hand in the quarterly subscriptions, for which in a measure they were responsible.

The first lady to respond to her name said, as she counted out £6 for the support of a village Bible-woman in South India, "Dear Mrs. Broadley, I am very doubtful about my being able to collect this amount next year."

Mrs. Broadley's attitude asked for a further explanation, and so the speaker continued, "For some months now we have had under serious consideration the question of redecorating our church, and every member is being asked to contribute liberally towards the £150 that must be raised in order to undertake this work. Several who have been contributing towards the support of Ratnamma, the Bible-woman, said they felt it was only right to throw their efforts into their own cause, and that if they gave to the Decoration Fund, they could not possibly contribute to the Bible-woman's Fund as well."

She paused, but still there was an air of inquiry

on the treasurer's face, and so she made another effort, saying, "We are only a small church, and several have quoted to me the old adage, 'Charity begins at home.'"

"I think our homes and churches would be far more richly blessed if charity so called were not strangled within their precincts ere it came to the birth," said someone in the audience.

And then another voice chimed in, "Let us be broad-minded enough to give our charity a chance to develop, rather than letting it end in the place where it begins."

"Well, what can I do?" said the young voluntary collector on behalf of Ratnamma, the Bible-woman, as she nervously twisted a diamond ring round and round her finger.

Apparently no one knew what she could do; for no one answered her tremulously-put question, and it certainly did not occur to her that the price of the unnecessary ring on her finger would have paid the Bible-woman her salary for many years in succession.

The next subscription was rather more satisfactory. It came from the members of the Christian Endeavour Society of a large church. It was for the support of a teacher in New Guinea. James Chalmers, the Martyr Missionary, and his noble pioneering work would never be forgotten by the young people of this church; and they kept steadily to their promise to pay for a teacher, whatever other claims were forced upon them.

The young lady who handed in the sum total of her collections remarked that the church members

had approached their society on the subject of presenting to the church a set of new china for use at the different church functions.

"They thought," said the girl, "it would be a graceful act on the part of the Christian Endeavourers to buy this new tea service; but it would have cost many pounds, and as we were bound to keep our promise concerning the teacher in New Guinea, we felt we must decline the new responsibility. We believe in preparing to honour the promissory note when it falls due, and then seeing how we stand with regard to fresh appeals."

"I feel very disheartened over my collecting," said the next one in response to her name when the treasurer called it. "Sometimes I have to call as many as half a dozen times at one house to collect the thirteence which is the quarterly amount promised by most of the subscribers. This year, too, we have had a new organ built for the church. That has cost us £500. Music takes such an important part in our services in these days, does it not? And it seems rather a costly item in our church expenditure. Our people have had to make quite an effort to pay for the organ. Indeed, there are £100 still owing on it, and we are having a series of concerts to clear off the debt. I am often surprised to see how carelessly the people pay two and three shillings to attend one of these concerts, and yet it is like extracting a good tooth to get the majority of them to give to the missionary cause. They do part with their pennies so reluctantly."

"Perhaps your subscribers want educating upon the subject," suggested someone. "Have you plenty of missionary literature to distribute as you go round collecting?"

"Ah yes, we have leaflets, and the monthly magazine, for which a few pay, and then leave it lying unread for months in the church pew. If they happen to get to church a few minutes early now and again, they may give the missionary paper a stray glance or two."

The receiving of the quarterly subscriptions occupied so long that the pale-faced medical missionary from China wondered if her opportunity for speaking would come that afternoon or not; but at last the chink, chink of the money was over, and the last excuse for the subscriptions being less, or not forthcoming at all, was made. Another hymn was sung, and the missionary rose to tell in low but impassioned tones the story of hopes and fears, of encouragements and disappointments, in the work amongst the Chinese women.

She sketched in glowing words, born of her own enthusiasm for her God-given work, the life of the women amongst whom she lived; she touched upon their womanhood's sorrows, borne for the most part patiently and uncomplainingly because there was no hope of life being otherwise for them. She told how they flocked to the hospital to obtain the help of the white woman doctor, and how in relieving their physical sufferings, the confidence of the poor women was won, and they were soon able to go a step farther, and tell the patients of Jesus their

Saviour and Friend, whom gradually they came to know and trust for themselves.

She showed how inadequate the comparatively few missionaries who were sent forth were to cope with the needs of the teeming millions of men and women in the vast Chinese Empire, and how the doors were standing ajar, nay, were even wide open, to welcome men and women of culture and of whole-hearted devotion in God's service.

She pleaded for more enthusiasm, for more liberal gifts, for a mighty outpouring of prayer, for a proving of God to see if He would not indeed open the windows of heaven, and pour out such a blessing on both home and foreign work that there should not be room enough to receive it.

She concluded by saying, "Dear friends, if the Lord Jesus is precious to you as your Friend and Saviour, as the Mediator between you and your God, will you not share your knowledge of Him with your less-favoured sisters? If you appreciate God's gift to you of His only and well-beloved Son, can you hold back your gifts that are to bring nearer the fulfilment of God the Father's promise to give to His Son the heathen for His inheritance? Have you ever prayed to the point of physical exhaustion that the Lord of the harvest would send His labourers to do the harvesting? Have you ever given to the point of self-denial? From what I can gather this afternoon, the majority of people from whom you collect these weekly pennies give in a spirit of indifference, or because they never miss what they give. What a mean offering to come

into His courts with! Think for a moment what it must have cost the Father to send His Son, the first and greatest of all foreign missionaries, to a people who not only rejected Him, but also put Him to a cruel death. Then bow your heads and hearts in deepest humiliation for those who can offer for God's work that which they never miss. It may be that God wants you personally for this service abroad. As His followers, we are ambassadors for Christ. I take it that an ambassador is one who serves his king and his country at some foreign court, and that if he remains in his own land without the permission of his king, he is guilty of rebellion, and as a rebel he has no more part or lot in the service of his royal master. Let us not be guilty of staying at home if the order for us to set out to a foreign land on a foreign embassy has been signed and sealed with the King's own signet. When the men of Gennesaret had knowledge of Jesus, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto Him all that were diseased."

There was a relieved sigh, and an unmistakable rustle of silken garments, and a jingling of ornaments, as the missionary resumed her seat. Her audience had been interested in what she had said, and some of them had even forgotten the heat as they watched the play of the speaker's expressive face; but the truth must be told that the majority of them were longing for the cool ices and the fragrant tea that they were sure Mrs. Olliver would have ready for them as soon as the meeting was over.

But before the ices and the tea, the chairwoman must speak ; for it was her duty to thank the lady who had made a long journey to be at that women's missionary meeting. She tendered the thanks of those who were present in a few well-chosen and graceful words, and then, holding a letter in her hands, said, "Many of you will remember our dear friend, Miss Roi, who left us for India some years ago. She writes to say that she hopes to be in our midst in the course of another year or so, when she will be able to tell us much of interest with regard to her work, and may I say 'our work,' for are we not helpers together in this great missionary enterprise? Meanwhile, she asks for an increased interest from us in the orphan girls under her charge. She has had a time of trial from sickness and death, and there seems to be urgent need for better sanitary arrangements for the children.

"I think I must postpone the reading of the letter until our next quarterly meeting, when perhaps some of you will come prepared with suggestions for helping Miss Roi out of her difficulty. . . . We will close our meeting with the benediction, and then," with a bright look at Mrs. Olliver, "we will adjourn to a shady spot in our dear Mrs. Olliver's beautiful garden, and partake of some refreshment that she has most thoughtfully provided for us on this dreadfully trying afternoon," and the good lady passed a delicately embroidered handkerchief over her moist face, as if to emphasise her own feelings with regard to the weather. Many of the audience imitated her out of sheer sympathy ; and then for a few minutes

the heads were bowed, and silence reigned as the last few words of committal into God's care were softly uttered.

Then arose a babel of voices, a pushing back of chairs, and an eager rush for the cool retreat afforded by the fine old trees in Mrs. Olliver's well-kept grounds. How the soft, velvety green of the lawns rested the eyes, and what a welcome change was the outside air after the heavily perfumed atmosphere of the rooms where the meeting had been held.

The maids in their pretty pink lawn dresses, white aprons and caps, moving softly over the grass, bearing great silver trays laden with costly china and all sorts of dainty confectionery, added to the charm of the outdoor surroundings; while the smart dresses and hats of the ladies who stood in groups, chattering away as they drank their tea or sipped their ices, gave many additional dashes of colour to the already brilliant scene.

The secretary of the women's missionary committee sat talking to Miss Russell, the lady doctor from China.

"This strikes you as a scene of beauty and luxury after your life of renunciation in China," she said, with a smiling interrogation in her face.

"Yes, indeed. The lady who has thrown her home open to us to-day must have given time and thought, not to mention expenditure, upon this afternoon's gathering. Tell me, please, does she expend some of her energies upon the missionary cause?"

"Well, we, who are, so to speak, in the inner circle

of the work, hope that this is a beginning towards a more active missionary interest in Mrs. Olliver. But we find that people who are most lavish over this kind of display consider many times before they can spare a few pounds for a subscription list."

"Mrs. Olliver is so smart, you know. I told mother I would not come to the meeting unless I could have a new hat," were the words that floated upon the air to where Mrs. Broadley and Miss Russell sat. They both heard, and a look of understanding passed between them, as though the thought of their hearts was one; but they had no time for exchanging their ideas ere the next words reached them, "How did you like the missionary?"

"Oh, she was all right. But how dowdy she looked in her plain black dress. She was quite the crow amongst all the peacocks," and the girl laughed at her own wit.

"What a lovely old garden this is, and how pretty Mrs. Olliver is. But we must go. See, there are only a few left now," and the thoughtless girls moved away to say good-bye to their hostess.

The sun declined, and one by one, or in friendly groups, Mrs. Olliver's visitors departed to catch trains or to be bowled along in luxurious carriages to their different homes.

The young people, more especially, chattered gaily, commenting upon the flowers, the dresses that friends had worn, and the lavish entertainment in the gardens.

The maids, who had all the extra work thrown upon them, grumbled to each other as they began the process of clearing up after the departed guests.

Mrs. Olliver walked through her now deserted rooms, and sighed, unconsciously perhaps, to see how the glory had departed from the beautiful decorations that hung so limp and faded-looking. She threw herself languidly into a cool bamboo chair, and before she was aware of it, she slept soundly ; but surely only for a few minutes, for she awoke with a frightened shiver at the sound of a sorrowful but penetrating voice in her ears, saying—

“ I gave My life for thee,
What hast thou given for Me?”

Almost involuntarily, but without any hesitation, for the question seemed to demand an answer, she replied, “ Nothing, Lord : for Thy sake alone, I have never brought an offering.”

In that waking moment, she knew that all her expenditure for that afternoon had been for the glorification of self, and as the knowledge swept over her soul, her eyes filled with tears of shame, and these gave to the fading beauties of the room a blurred and ugly appearance that appealed strongly to her, saying, over and over again, “ Why this waste ? ”

Ere Miss Russell retired that night, she planned to write to her girlhood's friend, Hilda Roi, whose name her heart had leapt to hear at the afternoon's meeting, and then for whose sake she had grieved to the point of vexation that the reading of her letter should have been put off for three months ; for she knew only too well what an extra strain it was upon the missionary, so often working single-handed, to

write the long, interesting letters that the missionary committee expected to receive periodically.

The girl sat for a long time, her pen poised in her fingers and her eyes gazing into space with a far-away, dreamy expression as she mentally saw some ever-changing, painfully-contrasting pictures, which were but the reflection of her afternoon's experience, and perhaps the result of her unspoken thoughts that she had been prevented interchanging with Mrs. Broadley.

She saw, side by side, Mrs. Olliver's luxurious home, and the bare, whitewashed rooms in far-off China to which she gave the name of hospital. The poor uncared-for women that crowded around her for healing and sympathy seemed to be mingling freely amongst the beautifully-dressed ladies who had attended that afternoon's meeting, and they were drawing their dainty robes away from the foreign touch of defilement and infection.

She was eating again of the abundant and rich food that she had shared with Mrs. Olliver's other guests, and as she ate she heard in imagination the cry of hunger from the women of India subsisting on one coarse meal in two days.

Then her thoughts circled around the spiritual advantages that the women of Western lands were privileged to enjoy, and yet how careless of others they were in their love of ease and refinement, in their security of the knowledge of Christ's forgiving love, while a black pall of heathen darkness hung over such a vast portion of God's fair earth, enshrouding its helpless victims in cruel superstition, that

forged chains of bondage, chains that were, oh, so strong and unbreakable, except as the Divine Son of the Living God touched them with spiritual power, bidding them fall away from the fettered souls, and leave their prisoners free.

The pictures passed away as the missionary, over whose heart the sweeping waves of heathenism had rolled; fell on her knees, and in the top flat of a London terrace implored the Lord, not for her beloved Chinese, but for the members of the Christian Church in the homeland, that they might receive such a baptism of the Holy Spirit's power as would open their eyes, inflame their hearts, empty them of self, do away with their security in Zion and their carelessness for the eternal welfare of others, until, emptied, cleansed, and filled, they should, as an army of women fully equipped for service, go forth and become lovely messengers of peace, bringing glad tidings of good things unto all the earth and unto the ends of the world.

**This book is under no circumstances to be
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